

THE ARGOSY.

FEBRUARY 2, 1874.

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

CHAPTER V

EDITH WEST.

THE London clocks were just striking midday as a gentleman drove up to the door of No. 6, Roehampton Terrace, Bayswater. It was Lionel Dering. He had reached London two days previously, but he would not venture to call on Edith West without first writing to her aunt and obtaining the requisite sanction. Mr. Garside had been dead nearly a year, but Edith and her aunt still continued to live together. In his note to Mrs. Garside, Lionel simply said that by a sudden change of fortune he was again in a position to pay his addresses to Miss West, and he solicited her permission to allow him to do so. Mrs. Garside was only too happy to bid him welcome to Roehampton Terrace. Indeed, it is by no means improbable that she would have welcomed him had he gone to her on the same errand without a shilling in the world. She had discovered long ago that Edith was too faithful to the memory of her first love for there to be much hope that a second one would ever find a place in her heart. As Mrs. Garside had said to herself a score times since her husband's death, "It would be far better for Edith to marry Mr. Dering without a penny than for her never to marry at all. Edith's fortune, if managed with economy, would suffice to keep them in tolerable comfort—not in London, perhaps, but in some quiet country place, or in some cheap corner of the Continent; and Edith is one of those girls who can make themselves happy anywhere."

Under these circumstances, it is hardly to be wondered at that Mrs. Garside was very glad to see Lionel Dering under her roof again, more

especially as he did not come to her in the disagreeable guise of a poor man. Tears came into her eyes as she held out her hand to him—genuine tears, for Mrs. Garside was one of those women who can weep on the slightest provocation. "It will be like new life to our darling Edith to have news of you once more," she said.

"Then she has not quite forgotten me?" said Lionel, eagerly.

"Forgotten you, Mr. Dering! How little you know of our sex if you think it possible for us so soon to forget those to whom our young affections have once been given."

"Is she—is Edith here in the house?" asked Lionel.

"She was in her own room only five minutes ago. I can understand your impatience, Mr. Dering, and will not keep you from her. I have refrained from saying a word to her about either your note or your visit. You shall yourself be the bearer of your own good tidings."

Three minutes later Lionel found himself in the presence of Edith. Mrs. Garside opened the door and ushered him in. The room was a very pleasant one, furnished with books, pictures, and curiosities of various kinds. At the farther end it opened into a small conservatory, which looked one dazzling mass of bloom as you entered the room. And there, sweetest flower of all, sat Edith, her face and figure clearly defined against a background of delicate ferns.

"Edith, dear, I have brought a long-lost friend to see you," said Mrs. Garside, as she and Lionel entered.

Edith dropped her book, and started up in surprise. Lionel was half hidden behind Mrs. Garside, and for the moment Edith mistook him for a stranger. But he had not advanced three paces before she saw who he was, and in a moment she was as one transformed. Her mouth dimpled into smiles, tears came nestling into her eyes—tears of happiness—her heart beat fast, her cheeks flushed to the tint of the wild rose when its petals first open to the sun, and with a little inarticulate cry of joy she sprang forward to greet her lover. She sprang forward, and then she halted suddenly, while a look of sadness clouded her face for a moment. With a sigh that ended in a half sob she held out her hand. Lionel grasped it in both his.

"How long you have been away!" she said as her eyes met his. Mrs. Garside slipped discreetly out of the room, and shut the door softly behind her.

Lionel lifted Edith's hand to his lips and kissed it. Then he looked at her with the same eager, anxious gaze that she had bent on him—he looked and was satisfied. His heart told him that he was still loved as fondly as ever he had been. Edith, too, after that first hungry look, veiled her eyes modestly, but there was a wild whirl of happiness at her heart. Lionel drew her face up to his, and kissed her twice very tenderly. Then he led her to the sofa, and sat down beside her.

"Yes; I have been a very long time away," he said at last. "But I

am come to-day, Edith, to ask you to keep me by your side through life—never more to let me wander from you."

Edith, in the first shock of her surprise, was too happy to speak. But her fingers tightened almost imperceptibly on his hand, and her face, resting on his shoulder, where he had placed it, nestled still closer: her silent answer was more eloquent than any words.

"Edith, I left you—my letter told you why," went on Lionel. "But all through the long dreary time when I was separated from you, my love for you never faltered, never wavered for one single moment. If I had never seen you again in this world, my heart's last breath would still have been yours. Yesterday I was poor—to-day I am rich. Once more I can ask you, as I asked you three years ago, to be my wife. Do not tell me that I am asking for more than you can give."

Edith's faith in Lionel was so full and complete, her love for him so deep-rooted, that she never paused—as many young ladies would have done—before giving him back the affection which had all along been his, to demand from him the reason for his apparent desertion of her three years before. In that first flush of new-born happiness it was enough to know that her lover had come back to her: the why and the wherefore of his leaving could be explained afterwards.

"You know, Lionel, that my love is yours always—that it has been yours for a long, long time," said Edith, in accents that trembled a little in spite of herself. "But I never received any letter from you after that last one dated from some far-away town in America."

"No letter!" exclaimed Lionel. "Not one explaining my reasons for releasing you from your engagement?"

"Never a single line, Lionel."

"But I gave the letter into your uncle's hands," returned Lionel. "He promised faithfully that he would give it you."

"He did not give it me," answered Edith. "Perhaps he kept it back because he thought it better that I should not see it."

"He had no right to do anything of the kind," said Lionel, sternly. "The letter was sacredly entrusted to him, and ought as sacredly to have been delivered to you."

"Lionel, my uncle is no longer with us," said Edith, gently. "You and I are together again. That redeems all. Let us never say another word about the letter."

"What a villain, what a mean wretch, you must have thought me," cried Lionel impulsively, "to break off my engagement without assigning you any reason! Without even a single word of explanation!"

"I thought you nothing of the kind," said Edith, with decision. "I knew you too well not to feel sure that you must have good and sufficient reasons for acting as you did. Although you did not tell me what

those reasons were—whatever may have been my disappointment at your silence—my faith in you never wavered."

"But when weeks and months passed away, and you never heard from me ——"

"I felt then that all was over between us ; felt it in a despairing, hopeless kind of way. But I cherished no resentment against you—none."

"But surely your uncle and aunt had some explanation to offer?"

"They told me that, through the failure of a bank, you had lost the whole of your fortune, and that, consequently, you had resigned all pretensions to my hand."

"And you?"

"I thought that you might have called to see me ; or, at least, have written to me. I could not understand why, if you still continued to care for me, you should choose to give me up simply because you had lost your fortune."

"You could not understand it?"

"Indeed I could not. And I fail to understand it now. If you were poor, I was rich. What greater happiness could I have than to endow you with my plenty? When I gave you my love, it meant that I gave you everything I could call mine."

"You look at the question from a woman's point of view, Edith : I, from a man's."

"If I had lost my fortune as you lost yours, would you have given me up?" asked Edith.

"Certainly not."

"Nor I you. With me, to love and to be loved is everything. In comparison with that all else is as nothing."

"Edith, I could not come to you penniless, and ask you to become my wife. When I found myself a poor man, I had no profession to fly to ; I was acquainted with no business. I was a great hulking good-for-nothing, able to plough and reap, and earn a bare crust by the sweat of my brow, and that was all. How was it possible for me to become a dependent on you for my daily bread?"

"You would not have been a dependent, Lionel. My money would have been yours, just as my love was yours."

"Still a woman's view, my dearest," said Lionel. "The noblest and the best, I at once admit. Only, the world would never have believed that I had not married you for your fortune."

"You and I together, Lionel, could have afforded to set the world's opinion at defiance."

Lionel ended the argument with a kiss.

A fair, sweet English face was that which nestled so lovingly on Lionel's shoulder. Edith West had large liquid dark brown eyes. Her eyebrows and eyelashes were nearly black, but the thick wavy masses

of her hair had no shade deeper than that of chestnuts in autumn. The tints of the wild-rose dwelt in her cheeks. About her there was a freshness, a sweetness, and a delicate grace, like that of a breezy morning in spring, when flowers are growing, and birds are singing, and all nature seems glad at heart.

"You are in mourning, Lionel," said Edith, suddenly.

"Yes ; I have just lost my uncle, Mr. St. George, of Park Newton."

"I never remember to have heard you speak of him."

"Probably not. I never even saw him, never had any communication with him whatever. Nevertheless, it is to him that I owe my fortune."

"It has come to you unexpectedly?"

"Entirely so. Three days ago I should have laughed at the idea of being my uncle's heir : now they tell me that I am worth eleven thousand a year."

"It sounds like a fairy tale," cried Edith. "What a strange man your uncle must have been!"

"When the will was read," returned Lionel, "my first thought was of you. I said to myself : 'Has Edith forgotten me ? Has she given me up ? Am I too late ?' I trembled to think what the answer might be. Now I tremble no longer."

"It is sweet, Lionel, to have you here, and to know that you are my own again," replied Edith. "But how much sweeter it would have been if you had come to me when you were poor, and had trusted everything to my love !"

A week passed away, each day of which saw Lionel Dering a visitor in Roehampton Terrace. Edith and he were much together. It was the happiest time they had ever known. All the freshness of their recent meeting was still upon them ; besides which, their long separation had taught them to value each other more, perhaps, than they would have done had everything gone smoothly with them from the first. The weather, for an English winter, was brilliant, and they rode out every morning into the country. Of an evening, Edith, Lionel, and Mrs. Garside had the drawing-room all to themselves ; and although an "exposition of sleep" generally came over the elder lady after dinner, the young people never seemed to miss her society, nor were they ever heard to complain that the time hung heavily on their hands.

They were very happy. They had so much to tell each other about the past—so many golden day-dreams to weave of what they would do in the future ! Edith could never hear enough about Lionel's life at Gatehouse Farm, and about his adventure with Tom Bristow ; while Lionel found himself evincing a quite novel interest in the well-being of sundry ragged-schools, homes for destitute children, and other philanthropic schemes of whose very existence he had been in utter ignorance only a few days before.

But everything must come to an end, and after a time there came a summons from Mr. Perrins. Lionel was wanted down at Park Newton. The old lawyer could go on no longer without him. So Edith and he were compelled to bid each other farewell for a week or two. Meanwhile, the post was to be the daily medium for the interchange of their vows and messages.

CHAPTER VI.

FIRST DAYS AT PARK NEWTON.

THE dining-room at Park Newton. A cosy little table, with covers set for two people, was drawn up near the fire. The evening was cold and frosty. The wax-candles were lighted, the logs on the hearth burned cheerily. A large Indian screen shut in this end of the room from the wilderness of gloom and desolation beyond; for the dining-room at Park Newton would accommodate fifty or sixty guests with ease. The clock on the mantel-piece pointed to ten minutes past seven. Lionel Dering was growing impatient.

"Perrins is generally punctuality itself," he said. "What can have detained him? I hope he is not ill."

He was on the point of ringing the bell, and sending the servant with a message to the lawyer's room, when Mr. Perrins came in. With many apologies for being late, he sat down to table; but Lionel saw at once that he was bursting with some important news. As soon as the first course was served, and the servant had left the room, Perrins began.

"I have some very startling information for you, Mr. Dering," he said. "My late arrival at table is owing to a certain discovery which I made about an hour ago."

"I hope you are not going to tell me that my eleven thousand a year is all moonshine," said Lionel, as he helped the lawyer to some clear soup.

"No, no, Mr. Dering. The news I have to tell you is not quite so bad as that, and yet it is bad enough in all conscience. While going through some of your uncle's papers this afternoon—you know what a quantity of them there are, and in what disorder he kept them—while engaged upon this necessary duty, I discovered—what think you, sir? what think you?"

"Another will, I suppose," said Lionel, slowly.

"Not another will, but a codicil, sir; a codicil to the will with whose provisions we are already acquainted; in the handwriting of the testator himself, witnessed in due form, and dated only three months ago!"

"And what may be the contents of this important document?" asked Lionel, as he crumbled his bread with apparent indifference.

"The contents are these : Should you, Lionel Dering, die unmarried or without lawful issue, the whole of the property bequeathed you by your uncle's will reverts to your cousin, Mr. Kester St. George, or to his children, should you be the longer liver of the two."

"Is that all?" said Lionel, with a sigh of relief.

"All, sir ! Quite enough, too, I should say, if I were in you place."

"Nobody can touch the property as long as I live ?"

"Certainly not."

"Then a fig for the rest ! Shall I send you a sole or some stewed eels ?"

"It is quite a relief to me to find how coolly you take my news ; though it is true your uncle could not well have made the contingency of your cousin's inheriting a more remote one."

"Tell me," said Lionel, "have you either seen or heard anything of Kester since my uncle's death ?"

"I have heard from him, but not seen him. He wrote to me a few days after your uncle's funeral, asking me to send him an abstract of the contents of the will. He gave an address in Paris, and I answered his letter by return of post."

"An address in Paris !" exclaimed Lionel. "That is very strange. I never felt more positive of anything than that my cousin Kester passed me on Westminster Bridge on the very night of my uncle's funeral."

"A coincidence, my dear sir, nothing more," said the lawyer, cheerfully. "Such things happen every day in London. It would almost seem as if every man had his double—a sort of unknown twin-brother—somewhere in the world."

Lionel pursued the subject no farther, but he was none the less convinced in his own mind that it was Kester, and no one but him, that he had seen. Could he ever forget the look of undying hatred that shone out of his cousin's eyes ?

"You have not yet advised Kester of the contents of the codicil ?" he said at last.

"I have not had time to do so. I purpose writing to him this evening : unless you wish me to defer doing so until you have satisfied yourself as to the authenticity of the document."

"My dear sir, if you are satisfied that the document is genuine, that is enough for me. Write to my cousin, by all means, and as soon as possible. By-the-by, you may as well give me his address. I shall probably drop him a line myself."

"I may as well tell you," said Mr. Perrins, as he gave the address, "that the balance of six thousand and odd pounds, which I found to your uncle's credit in his bank pass-book at the time of his decease represents, with the exception of a few shares in one or two public companies, the accumulated savings of Mr. St. George's lifetime."

"What! out of an income of eleven thousand a year?"

"Even so. When your uncle died, everybody who had known him, and who knew his simple, inexpensive mode of life, said: 'He must have saved a hundred thousand pounds at the very least.' But the reverse of that has proved to be the fact. In going through Mr St. George's papers, I found numerous receipts for very large donations made by him to different charities. He seems to have received his rents with one hand and to have given them away with the other. In fact, your uncle was one of those unknown philanthropists of whom the world hears nothing, but whose wealth, like a bounteous stream, diffuses countless blessings among the sick and poor."

"And yet," said Lionel to himself, "this was the man who refused to forgive his own sister because he fancied that she had married beneath her!"

Mr. Perrins went off to bed at an early hour, after indulging in a due modicum of choice old port; but Lionel sat up till far into the small hours, with no companion but his favourite meerschaum.

His musings were very pleasant ones. How could they be otherwise? Not till to-day had he seemed to realize to the full all that was implied by his sudden change of fortune. In London he was nobody, or next to nobody; one rich man among ten thousand. Here, at Park Newton, he was lord and master of everything. This gray old mansion, with its wide sweep of park, and its noble trees which might be counted by hundreds, were all his, with many a fair and fruitful farm that now lay sleeping under the midnight moon. To the gracious shelter of that stately old roof he would in a little while bring his bride. There would their lives gradually wear themselves away in a round of daily duties, edged with a quiet happiness that never tires. In one or other of those rooms their last breath would ebb away: in the long gallery upstairs two more portraits would be added to the line of dead and gone ancestors. And then would come the day when a new master, his son, would reign at Park Newton, who would, in his turn, bring home a fair young bride, and would dream, perchance in that very room, in the dim years to come, dreams the like of those which the brain of Lionel Dering was shadowing forth to-night among the smoke-wreaths that floated slowly upward from his pipe.

But before that time should come there was, he hoped and thought, a long and happy future in store for himself and Edith. As he passed with his candle through the dim picture-gallery on his way to bed, each one of the old portraits seemed to greet him with a grim smile of welcome. With a queer, half-joyous, half-superstitious feeling at his heart, he turned at the gallery door. "Bon soir, messieurs," he said, with a bow to the silent crowd that seemed watching him so intently. "I hope—after a time—to form one of your pleasant society."

Lionel was up betimes next morning, and took a stroll round the

house and shrubberies before breakfast. Park Newton dated from the era of William and Mary, and had little to boast of in the way of architectural magnificence. It was built of brick, with a profusion of stone copings, and mullions, and twisted chimneys. But its walls were now gray and venerable with age, powdered with lichens and delicate fairy mosses, and clasped about here and there with clinging tendrils of ivy. Everything about it was old and homelike. It had an air of stately comfort which seemed to carry back the mind instinctively to the days of periwigs and ruffles, of clouded canes and buckled shoes ; before we English had become the gadabout race we are now ; when a country gentleman's house was his home the whole year round, and country roads were altogether impassable in bad weather.

Lionel had not been many hours at Park Newton before he began to have visitors. The county families and neighbouring gentry who had known the late Mr. St. George either called or left their cards. Lionel was young and unmarried, and would be a decided acquisition to the limited circle of Midlandshire bachelors : that is to say, of eligible bachelors. Of ineligible bachelors there were always enough and to spare. But the advent of such a possible prize—of a bird with such splendid plumage as the new owner of Park Newton—was enough to send a pleasurable thrill through all the dovecotes within a circuit of twenty miles. Of the existence of a certain young lady, Edith West, by name, nothing, of course, was known or suspected.

One of the first to call at Park Newton, and introduce himself to Lionel, was the Reverend John Wharton, the vicar of Duxley. Mr. Wharton was an octogenarian, but hale and hearty ; as far as appearances went, he seemed likely to last for another twenty years.

"My having known your uncle, the late Mr. St. George, must be my apology for intruding upon you so soon," he said, as he shook Lionel warmly by the hand. "And not your uncle only, but your grandfather also. And now I should like to know you."

"You are very kind," said Lionel. "And I appreciate the honour you have done me."

"There was another member of the family, too, whom I recollect very well," said the vicar, as they sat together in the library. "I refer to your mother."

"Did you know my mother?" asked Lionel, eagerly.

"I did indeed. I remember her first as a sweet slip of a girl, playing and romping about the house and grounds. Then I missed her for three or four years while she was away at school. Then she came back, a sedate young lady, but very, very pretty. How fond your grandfather was of her! But he never forgave her for running away and marrying your father—never, that is, until he lay dying."

"Do you mean to say, sir, that my grandfather ever did forgive my mother?"

"Certainly he forgave her, but not till he lay on his deathbed. I was in the room at the time and heard his words. Taking your uncle's hand in his, your grandfather said—and his words came very slowly and feebly:—'Arthur, life and its duties look very different, as I lie here, from what they did when I was in health. It lies on my conscience that I never forgave poor Dorothy. It's too late to send for her now, but send her my blessing after I'm gone, and say that I loved her to the last.' He shut his eyes, and was silent for a little while. Then he spoke again. 'Arthur,' he said to your uncle, 'is it your intention ever to marry?' 'I shall never marry, father,' was the answer. 'Then who's to have Park Newton, after your time?' 'It will not go out of the family, you may depend upon that, father,' said your uncle. 'Some time or other it will have to go to one of the two boys,' resumed your grandfather; 'either to Dorothy's boy, or to Geoffrey's son, Kester. Now I don't want to tie you down in any way, Arthur, but I confess I should like Dorothy's lad to have Park Newton. He could change his name to St. George, you know. Young Kester might have a life allowance out of the estate of two or three thousand a year, and there would still be enough left to keep up the old place in proper style. I feel that I have acted wrongly to Dorothy. There is some reparation due to her. If I thought that her boy would one day have the estate, I think I should die happier.' 'Father, it shall be as you wish,' said Arthur St. George, solemnly."

"A promise that was made only to be broken," said Lionel, bitterly. "I have heard my mother say that the first intimation she had of my grandfather's death was derived from the columns of a newspaper. Further than that, my uncle Arthur never wrote a single line to my mother; never would even see her; never hold any communication with her, direct or indirect, to the last day of her life."

"You shock me," said the old clergyman. "Can that indeed be true?"

"I tell you, sir," said Lionel, "that this is the first time I ever heard of any such wish having been expressed by my grandfather. Two months ago I had no more expectation than you had of ever coming into the Park Newton property. My cousin Kester was always looked upon as the heir."

"He was, greatly to my surprise, knowing what I knew. Your uncle adopted him and brought him up as his own son."

"And, had it not been for some mysterious quarrel that took place between my uncle and my cousin, Kester St. George would undoubtedly at this moment have been the owner of Park Newton."

"What you say seems only too probable," said the vicar. "And yet I always looked upon Mr. St. George as one of the most

conscientious of men, as he was, undoubtedly, one of the most charitable."

"A pity that in this case his charity did not begin nearer home," said Lionel. "That must have been a terrible quarrel," he added presently, "which could induce my uncle to alter the determination of a lifetime, and leave the property away from my cousin."

"True," said the vicar. "I have often wondered of what nature it could be: But Mr St. George never spoke of it to anyone. He was a very close man in many ways."

There was much food for thought in what Mr. Wharton had just told Lionel. "My grandfather intended me to have Park Newton, and I've got it," he said to himself, after the vicar had gone. "But it was also his wish that Kester should have two or three thousand a year out of the estate. I'll write to Perrins to know how it can be done."

Mr. Perrins had gone back to London a few hours previously. Lionel wrote to him by that night's post. Next morning but one he had the following answer: "By the terms of your uncle's will and codicil you have no power to make any such allowance out of the estate as the one suggested by you. You can, of course, make any allowance you may please, and to anybody, privately, and as a gift out of your own pocket; but it is not competent for you to burden the estate with any charge of such a nature."

Would his cousin accept three thousand a year from him as a gift? It was a delicate proposition to put to a man circumstanced as was Kester St. George.

Lionel had not been many days at Park Newton when he was called upon by Mr. Cope, the banker, with whom came Mr. Culpepper of Pincote.

Mr. Cope was the senior partner in the firm of Sugden and Co., the well known bankers of Duxley. The late Mr. St. George had had an account with the firm for twenty years, which account Mr. Cope was desirous of still retaining on his books, with nothing but a simple alteration of the customer's name.

Squire Culpepper was a friend of Mr. Cope, and had been an intimate friend of Mr. St. George; consequently, it was only natural that he and the banker should drive over to Park Newton together. Lionel gave them a hearty welcome. The banker was successful in the particular object of his visit, and was further gratified by Lionel's acceptance of an invitation to dine with him, *en famille*, the following day.

"Pincote ought by rights to have been your first place of call," said Mr. Culpepper to Lionel as he was bidding him good-bye. "But Cope here has stolen a march on me, as usual. However, I'll forgive him if you'll come and see us at Pincote before this day week."

Lionel laughed and promised.

Mr. Cope was a heavily-built, resolute-looking man of middle age, with a brusque business manner, which had become so confirmed in him by habit that he could not throw it off in private life. He had neither the education nor the manners of a well-bred gentleman, but he inspired respect by the shrewdness of his intellect, and a certain innate force of character which made itself felt by all with whom he came in contact. His father had originally been office-boy to the firm of Sugden and Co., but, in the course of thirty years, had gradually worked his way up to the honourable post of managing clerk. Ultimately, three or four years before his death, he had been elevated to a junior partnership. Already young Horatio Cope, although merely filling the position of an ordinary clerk in the bank, had displayed such natural aptitude as a financier that, when his father died, the vacant post was at once given him, and the firm had never had reason to regret the choice thus made. As time went on, the two oldest members of the Sugden family died within a few months of each other. Two or three years later the youngest of the three brothers was accidentally drowned. Of the original firm there then were left but two young men, of three or four and twenty, cousins, who knew little or nothing about the business, who were rich enough to live without it, and who preferred a life of ease and pleasure to the cares and toils which must devolve on those who would successfully steer a large financial concern through the troubled waters of speculation. In this crisis all that could be done was to fall back on Horatio Cope. He was master of the situation, and he knew it. The result was that he was offered a partnership in the firm on equal terms with the two cousins. They were to supply the capital necessary for the conduct of the business, but the entire management was to devolve on him. All this had happened several years ago; and in Duxley and its neighbourhood few men were better known, or more generally esteemed, than Mr. Cope.

He was a very proud man, this heavy, awkward-looking, middle-aged banker. His secret ambition was to obtain a footing among the county families of Duxley and its neighbourhood, and to be treated by them, if not exactly as an equal, yet with as near an approach to that blissful state of things as might be. But, somehow, notwithstanding all his efforts, the old plebeian taint seemed still to cling to him. The people among whom it was his highest ambition to live and move simply tolerated him, and that was all. He was rich, and, to a certain extent, was still a rising man. He could be made use of in many ways. So he was invited to their state dinners, and sometimes to their more private balls and parties; but, for all that, he felt that he did not belong to them—that he never could belong to them—that he stood outside a magic circle which to him must be for ever impassable. It was only by slow degrees, and after a long time, that these disagreeable truths

were brought fully home to the banker's mind. But when he did realize them, he bethought himself that he had a son.

Mr. Cope's stanchest friend and best ally was, undoubtedly, Squire Culpepper, of Pincote. It had been the banker's good fortune, some thirty odd years ago, to be in a position to do an essential service to Titus Culpepper, at that time an impecunious young man, without a profession, and with no prospects in particular; and the squire, when he afterwards came into his property, was not the man to forget it. At Pincote the banker was ever a welcome guest; and if anyone had asked the squire to point out the man whom he believed to be his best friend, that man would undoubtedly have been Horatio Cope.

It was a great step in Mr. Cope's favour to be so taken in hand by a man like Mr. Culpepper, who, although only moderately rich, and a commoner, was the representative of one of the most ancient and respected families in the county, and could, in fact, show a pedigree older by two centuries and a half than that of the great Duke of Midlandshire himself. Squire Culpepper had only one child, a daughter; and it seemed to Mr. Cope that it would be an excellent thing if a match could be brought about between his son and the young lady in question. By marrying Miss Culpepper, his son would at once secure a position in society such as he himself could never hope to attain; and if, in addition, the young man could be smuggled into parliament, and could succeed in making one tolerably good speech there, why, then he thought that the great ambition of his life would be as near fulfilment as it was ever likely to be in his time. By what occult means Mr. Cope succeeded in inducing the squire to so far overcome the prejudices of caste as to agree to the marriage of his daughter with the grandson of a man who had lighted the fires and swept out the offices of Sugden's bank, was best known to himself. But certain it is that he did succeed; and the match was arranged, and the pecuniary conditions agreed to, before either of the two persons most interested so much as knew a word about it.

Squire Culpepper, at this time, was from fifty-five to sixty years old. He was a short, wiry, keen-faced man, with restless, fidgetty ways, and a firm belief in his own shrewdness and knowledge of the world. Except when dressed for dinner, his ordinary attire was a homely suit of shepherd's plaid, with thick shoes and gaiters. His head-gear was a white hat, with a black band, generally much the worse for wear. The Squire's shabby hats were known to everybody. His tongue was sharp, and his temper hasty, but he was as sweet and sound at heart as one of his own Ribstone pippins.

Mr. Cope had a fine, handsome modern-built house just outside Duxley. When Lionel arrived, he found his host in the drawing-room waiting to receive him. The Squire had not yet come. When he did

arrive, he was half an hour past his time. He apologised, on the ground that he had been to a sale of cattle some twenty miles off, and had not been able to get back earlier. It was obvious to Lionel, and doubtless to Mr. Cope also, that the Squire had been drinking—not inordinately, by any means, but just enough to make him more merry and talkative than usual. After dinner, some splended old port was put on the table; and it seemed to Lionel that the banker, while drinking nothing but an innocuous claret himself, kept pressing the decanter of port on the Squire's attention oftener than was at all necessary, and seemingly of set purpose. The Squire, nothing loth, smacked his lips, and drank glass after glass with evident gusto. As a consequence, he became more merry and communicative than ever. Had Lionel known at the time what a very rare occurrence it was for the Squire to allow himself to become, even in the slightest degree, the worse for wine, he might have asked himself whether the banker's object was not to obtain from him, while in that talkative mood, certain information which it would have been hopeless to expect him to divulge at any other time. But Lionel, knowing nothing of this, was entirely in the dark as to what Mr. Cope's object could possibly be.

"Did you buy any stock at Cottingly, to-day?" asked the banker.

"Not a single hoof," answered the Squire. "The prices were ruination. I'll keep my money in my pocket, and wait for better times."

"You know Cottingly, don't you?" he asked presently of the banker.

"Pretty well," answered Mr. Cope.

"Do you know Drake and Harding, the architects?"

"I've heard of the firm—nothing more. But if you want an architect, there's a clever young fellow here in Duxley."

"I know him. His name's Beakon. He's quite a fool."

"Quite a fool, is he?" said the banker, equably. "So be it."

"I've proved it, sir—proved it. No, Drake and Harding are the men for my money. Everything's settled. They'll bring the plans over to Pincote on Wednesday afternoon. If you have nothing better to do, you may as well drive over and help me to decide on the most suitable one."

"The plans! What plans?" said Mr. Cope, in astonishment. "You forget that I'm altogether in the dark."

"Why, what plans could I mean but the plans for my new house?" cried the Squire, as he refilled his glass. "I thought I had told you all about it weeks ago."

"This is the first time you have ever hinted at such a thing. But you don't mean to say that you are going to pull down Pincote!"

"I mean to say nothing of the kind," said the Squire, peevishly. "But, for all that, I may be allowed to build myself a new house if I choose to do so, I suppose?"

"Certainly—certainly," said the banker, with a look of depreciation.

"I know what you think."

"I beg your pardon."

"I say, sir, that I know what you think," repeated the Squire, with half sober vehemence. "You think that because I've reduced my balance during the last six months from nine thousand pounds to somewhere about three thousand, and because I've sold all my stocks and securities, that I've been making ducks and drakes of my money, and don't know what I'm about. But you never made a greater mistake in your life, Horatio Cope."

"You do me a great injustice, my dear Squire. No such thought ever entered my mind."

"Don't tell me. I know what you bankers are."

Mr. Cope shrugged his shoulders and looked at Lionel with the air of an injured man.

"You don't believe in any speculation unless you've a finger in the pie yourself," continued the Squire. "But other people have got their heads screwed on right as well as you. Why, man, I tell you that in less than six months from this time, I shall be worth an extra hundred thousand pounds at the very least."

"I'm truly delighted to hear it," said the banker, heartily. "No man will congratulate you with more sincerity than I shall."

"And you ought to be delighted to hear it, seeing that my daughter and your son will soon be man and wife. But, mind you, I don't mean to turn miser with it. I intend to build, and plant, and dig. You know that knoll in the park where the old Gothic summerhouse stands?"

"I know it well."

"That's the spot where I intend to build my new house. The young folk can have Pincote. I don't intend to pull the old place down. After I'm gone, of course the new place will be theirs as well. And, if I live, I mean to make it a place worth having."

The Squire refilled his glass. Mr. Cope, deep in thought, was absently drumming with his fingers on the table.

"Pincote is a very old place, is it not?" asked Lionel.

"It was built three hundred and fifteen years ago, and it's still as weather-proof as ever it was. But because one's great grandfather six times removed, chose to build a house, is that any reason why we shouldn't build another? At all events, I mean to try what I can do."

"The speculation you have hit upon must be something remarkable," said the banker, holding up a glass of wine before the lamp.

"It is. Something *very* remarkable," said Mr. Culpepper with a chuckle. "You would like to know the ins and outs of it, wouldn't you, now?"

"I should, indeed. It's too bad of you to keep such a good thing all to yourself."

"Ha ! ha !" laughed the squire, in high glee. "I thought you would say that. You'll know all in good time, I daresay. But at present—it's a secret. That's what it is—a secret."

"Must have found a silver mine on his estate," said Mr. Cope, with a sly look at Lionel.

"Or a coal mine, which would be pretty much the same thing," returned Lionel.

The Squire laughed loud and long. "Ah ! you're a sharp lot, you bankers," he cried. "But you don't know everything." And then he winked at Lionel.

Lionel was not sorry when the evening came to an end, and he found himself on his way back to Park Newton. "My first introduction to Midlandshire society is not very promising," he said to himself. "I hope to find it a little more entertaining by-and-by."

The Squire, after being safely helped into his dog-cart, was driven home by his groom.

Mr. Cope, after his guests were gone, stood for a full quarter of an hour with his back to the drawing-room fire, ruminating over the events of the evening. Judging by the settled frown on his face, his meditations were anything but pleasant ones. "My worst fears are confirmed," he said to himself. "Culpepper has been induced to speculate on his own account. His balance at the bank yesterday was only two thousand and odd pounds,—and every security disposed of! Some swindler has got hold of him, and the result will be that he will lose every penny that he has invested. Build himself a new mansion, indeed ! Unless he's very careful, the Court of Bankruptcy will soon be the only mansion he can claim the right to enter."

At this moment his son, Edward, entered the room.

"Have you been to Pincote to-day ?" said the banker.

"I have just returned from there," answered the young man.

"If I were you, Edward," said Mr. Cope, looking steadily at his son, "I wouldn't allow my feelings to become too closely entangled with Miss Culpepper. You're only on probation, you know, and I wouldn't—in short, I wouldn't push matters so far as to leave myself without a door of escape, in case anything should happen to—to—in short, you understand perfectly what I mean."

"You mean to say, sir —" stammered the young man.

"I mean to say nothing more than I've said already," interrupted the banker. "My meaning is perfectly simple. If you cannot understand it, you are more stupid than I take you to be. Good night." At the door he turned. "Remember this," he added. "When you enter an enemy's country, never burn your boats behind you. Bad policy." And with a final nod, the banker was gone.

"Now, what on earth does he mean with his 'enemy's country,' and his 'burning boats'?" said Edward Cope, with a comical look of despair. "I wish some people would learn to talk plain English."

CHAPTER VII.

KESTER ST. GEORGE.

ALTHOUGH Lionel Dering had obtained Kester St. George's address in Paris from Mr. Perrins, he had not yet written to him. He put off writing from day to day, hardly knowing, in fact, in what terms to couch his letter. He could not forget the look he had seen in his cousin's eyes during their momentary recognition of each other on Westminster Bridge. Were they to be as friends or as enemies to each other in time to come? was the question Lionel asked himself times without number. At last he decided not to write at all, but to wait till Kester should return to England, and then see him in person.

After a fortnight at Park Newton, Lionel ran up to town. As a matter of course, his first visit was to Edith. His second was to Mr. Perrins. From the latter he ascertained that a copy of the codicil had been duly sent to Kester at Paris, but had not yet been acknowledged. Lionel's next visit was to the Dodo Club, in Pall Mall, of which club he had ascertained that his cousin was a member. "Yes, Mr. St. George was in town—had been in town for some days," said the hall porter, in answer to his inquiry. "Most likely he would look in at the club in the course of the afternoon or evening." On the spur of the moment, Lionel sat down and wrote the following note, which he left at the Dodo for his cousin: "Dear Kester, I am in town and should much like to see you. Drop me a line saying when and where I can have the pleasure of calling."

A few hours afterwards he had the following answer: "Old fellow—Come and breakfast with me to-morrow. Eleven sharp. Shall be delighted to see you."

The address given was 28, Great Carrington Street, West, at the door of which house Lionel's cab deposited him as the clock was striking eleven next morning.

Kester St. George's chambers were luxuriously fitted up. They seemed an appropriate home for a man of wealth and fashion. Kester, attired in a flowery dressing-robe, with a smoking cap on his head, was lounging in slippered ease before a well-furnished breakfast table. While there was no one to see him, he looked careworn and gloomy. He held an open letter in one hand, the reading of which seemed to have been anything but a source of satisfaction to him. "Won't wait more than another week, won't he!" he muttered.

"Not to be put off with any more of my fine promises, eh? If I were cleared out to-morrow, I couldn't raise more than a bare

two fifty — just an eighth of the two thousand Grimble says he must have out of me before seven days are over : and he means it this time. If I could only raise five hundred, that might satisfy him till I get a turn of luck. I wonder—as I've often wondered—whether Dering knows of that little secret down at Park Newton. How fortunate that he's coming here this morning ! I'll pump him. If he knows nothing of it—why then, we shall see what we shall see. What with the diamonds and one thing or another, it ought to be good for five or six hundred at the very least. That must be Dering's knock."

"Dear boy ! so pleased to see you ! so glad to find you have not forgotten me !" were Kester's first words, accompanied by a hearty shake of the hand. All traces of gloom and depression had vanished from his face. He looked as if he had not a care in the world.

"I am not likely to forget you, Kester," said Lionel. "I should have hunted you up weeks back, but I heard that you were in Paris."

"So I was in Paris—only got here three days ago. What will you take, tea or coffee ? I've something fresh here in potted meats that I can strongly recommend."

Kester St. George at this time was thirty-three years old. He was a tall, well-built man, with something almost military in his bearing and carriage. He had bold, well-cut, aquiline features, a clear, pale olive complexion, and black, restless eyes. Black, too, jet black, were his thick eyebrows and his heavy, drooping moustache : but already his hair had faded to an iron-grey. He had one of those rare voices—low, soft, and persuasive, but perfectly clear, which are far more dangerous to a woman's peace of mind than mere good looks can ever hope to be. It was a voice whose charm few men could resist. Yet it was so uniformly dulcet, it was pitched so perpetually in a minor key that some people came at last to think that through all its sweetness, through all that pleasant flow of words which Kester St. George could command at will, they could detect a tone of insincerity—the ring, as it were, of counterfeit metal trying to pass itself off as good, honest gold. But, then, some people are very fanciful—ridiculously so : and the majority of those who knew Kester St. George were satisfied to vote him a capital talker, and very pleasant company, and neither wished nor cared to know anything more.

"It must be eight or nine years, Li, since you and I met last," said Kester, as he helped his cousin to some coffee.

"Yes, about that time," said Lionel.

"You are so altered that I should hardly have known you again."

"I suppose so," answered Lionel. "But I should have known you anywhere."

"How ?"

"By your eyes."

"Ah !" A pause, while Kester leisurely chipped an egg.

"Have you had any news lately from Uncle Lionel?"

"I have not had a letter from India for over six months."

"What a fine old boy he is! Do you know, Li, I was quite jealous of the way he took to you; making such a pet of you, and all that? He must be getting old now."

"I believe he is either fifty-nine or sixty."

"Quite time he left the service, and settled down at home for the remainder of his days. He must have made a pot of money out there, eh?"

"I don't think Uncle Lionel is one of the money-making kind."

"He must have some scrapings somewhere. I only hope he won't forget his graceless nephew Kester, when he comes to make his will. By-the-by, you have a brother out there, haven't you?"

"Yes. The only brother I have."

"Doing well?"

"Very well."

"Ah, here comes Pierre with a couple of Digby chicks. Famous relish. Try one. And how do you like Park Newton, Li?"

"I get to like it better as I become more familiar with it. It grows upon one day by day."

"Sweet old spot! For years and years I never dreamed that anyone other than myself would be its master after my uncle's death."

"We all thought the same," said Lionel. "You will give me credit for sincerity when I say that no one could have been more surprised than I was by the contents of Uncle Arthur's will."

"I know it; I know it. From the day I quarrelled with my uncle, I felt that my chance was gone for ever. It was only right that you should be made the heir, vice Kester in disgrace. If there had been no such person as you in existence, the property would have been left either to your brother or to Uncle Lionel. If they had both been dead, Park Newton would have gone to some hospital or asylum. In no case would a single shilling have ever come to me." Kester spoke with exceeding bitterness, and Lionel could not wonder at it. But his gloom did not last more than a minute or two. He shook it off lightly. "Che sarà, sarà," he said, with a shrug and a laugh. Then he rose and got his cigar-case. "Let us have a smoke," he said. "After all, life in Bohemia is very jolly. It is pleasant to live by one's wits at the expense of other people who have none. Fools fortunately abound in this world: while they are plentiful, men of brains need never starve." This was said with a sort of defiant cynicism that it pained Lionel to hear.

"Kester," he said, "something was told me the other day that I never heard of before; something that affects you."

"Something that affects me! What was it?" His tone was abrupt and full of suspicion;

"Mr. Wharton, the vicar of Duxley, told me that when my grandfather lay dying, he expressed a wish that if Uncle Arthur should die without children, the estate should come to me; but that an allowance of three thousand a year should be paid out of it to you as long as you lived."

"I have heard my uncle say many a time that my grandfather was in his dotage for months before he died," said Kester, contemptuously.

"Whether he was in his dotage or no, there is no doubt that such a wish was expressed by him. Strangely enough, his wish has come true as regards myself: why should it not come true in your case also?"

"Lionel Dering, what is that you mean?"

"Simply this: Three thousand a year out of the Park Newton property belongs morally to you, and —"

"And you want to settle that sum on me?"

"I do."

"You propose, in all seriousness, to give me, Kester St George, three thousand a year out of your income of eleven thousand?"

"In all seriousness, that is what I propose to do."

Kester's face flushed deeply. He got up, walked across the room, and stood looking out of the window for two or three minutes.

"No! a thousand times no!" he exclaimed at last with startling abruptness. "I cannot accept your offer."

"Is not the sum large enough?" asked Lionel.

"Not one penny piece, Lionel Dering, will I ever accept at your hands!"

"But why not? What is your objection?"

"Do not ask me. I would not tell you if I could. Let it suffice that my objection is insuperable and—let us never talk about this again." He rang the bell violently. "Pierre, cognac and seltzer. Do you do anything in the racing line?" asked Kester in his lightest tone as Pierre left the room.

"Nothing. I'm as fond of a horse as any man, but I'm profoundly ignorant of racing, and I never bet."

"That's a pity, because I could have put you up to one or two good things for the spring meetings. Fine institution—betting," added Kester, as he lighted another cigar. "It is one of the pleasantest of our vices, when judiciously pursued. When we win, it is a source of double gratification: we not only put money into our own pockets, but we take it out of the pockets of other people."

"And when you lose?" said Lionel.

"To bear one's losses like a man of the world and a gentleman is to prove that the teachings of philosophy have not been in vain."

"May I venture to hope that, as yet, you have had no occasion to seek consolation in the teachings of philosophy?"

"I won four thousand over the last St. Leger."

"For the present, then, the Stoics are at a discount.—Kester," said

Lionel, abruptly breaking off the subject, "you won't object to come and see me at Park Newton?"

Kester was leaning back in his easy chair, watching the smoke-wreaths as they curled idly upwards from his cigar. His thick black eyebrows came together in a deep, meditative frown as he heard Lionel's question. For a minute or two he did not answer.

"Frankly, no. I'll come and see you," he said at last. "Why shouldn't I? It will pain me at first to go back to the old place as guest, where once I thought that I should be master. But, thank Heaven, I'm not one of the most impressionable of men, and the feeling will soon wear off. Yes, Lionel, I'll come and see you."

Lionel was pleased that he had succeeded so far. "Perhaps, after a time," he thought, "I may be able to persuade him to accept the three thousand a year."

"You will keep up the old place in proper style, I suppose?" said Kester presently.

"I shall live very quietly—at least for some time to come," said Lionel.

"Which means, I suppose, that you will see very little company, and not rest satisfied unless you can save two-thirds of your income. That you will breakfast and dine in that ugly little parlour which overlooks the fishpond, and snore by night outside the huge four-poster in the Griffin-room."

Lionel laughed his careless, good-hearted laugh. "To one count of your indictment I can plead guilty," he said. "I certainly have both breakfasted and dined in the parlour overlooking the fishpond. But, on the other hand, I have certainly never slept in the Griffin, which has been kept locked up ever since Uncle Arthur's death."

"Ah!" sighed Kester, and it sounded so like a sigh of relief or thankfulness that Lionel could not help noticing it. "No wonder you don't care to sleep in the Griffin," he added, after a brief pause. "With its oak-panelled walls, and its plumed bedstead that always put me in mind of a hearse, it used to give me a fit of horrors whenever I went into it; and yet my uncle would never sleep anywhere else."

It should be mentioned that the bedrooms at Park Newton were each of them individualised with a name—generally that of some bird, fish, or animal. Among others, there were the Dolphin, the Pelican, and the Griffin. Such had been the whim of one of the former owners of the place, and none of his successors had seen fit to alter the arrangement.

After a little more desultory conversation, Lionel rose to go. As he stood with his elbow resting on the chimney-piece, his eye was attracted by a brace of duelling pistols which hung on the wall close by. They were old-fashioned, clumsy-looking weapons, but deadly enough, no doubt, in efficient hands.

"With permission," said Lionel, as he took one down to examine. Kester took down the other. The one Lionel had taken was unloaded; the one in Kester's hands loaded—a fact of which Kester was quite aware. The day was dull, and Lionel took his pistol to the window, that he might examine it more closely. Kester stood by the chimney-piece on the other side of the room. As he stood thus, a terrible temptation took possession of him. "What if you were to kill him where he stands!" something seemed to whisper in his ear: and for a moment his whole being shrank back aghast. But for a moment only.

"I could shoot him dead on the spot, put the discharged pistol into his hand the moment after he had fallen, and no one could say that he had not shot himself. Park Newton would then be mine, and I should be revenged."

These thoughts flashed like lightning through Kester's brain. The room and everything in it seemed to recede and fade into nothingness—everything except that silent black-clothed figure by the window. Kester's heart beat strangely. His breath came in hot gasps. There were blood-red motes in his eyes—blood-red motes falling everywhere. Mechanically, and without any conscious volition on his part, his right arm went up to a line with his shoulder. The barrel was pointed straight at Lionel's head.

He paused and trembled. In another moment, for good or for ill, would have come the climax. Suddenly, and without warning, Pierre, the velvet-footed, flung open the door. "A telegram for you, sir," he said. "The messenger is waiting."

The pistol fell from Kester's nervous grasp. Lionel looked up and was saved.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MIDNIGHT INTRUDER.

LIONEL DERING found himself back at Park Newton three days earlier than he had intended. Mrs. Garside's sister in Paris having been suddenly taken ill, Mrs. Garside was telegraphed for to go over. She begged of Edith to accompany her. Lionel ran down with them as far as Dover, saw them safely on board the steamer, and then bade them good-bye.

There being no longer any attraction for him in London, he decided to go straight through to Park Newton, as several matters there claimed his attention, and he went accordingly. He reached home about seven o'clock in the evening, much to the consternation of Mrs. Benson, his housekeeper, who had not expected him till the end of the week, and who was in the midst of a high festival of scrubbing and scouring. Among other places, Lionel's bedroom was in a topsy-turvy condition, and altogether unfit for occupation; so that Mrs. Benson, with many apologies, was compelled to ask him whether he would object to sleep

in another room for that night only. Lionel, who was the most good-natured of men with his servants, made no objection to the change.

After his simple dinner was over, Lionel spent an hour among his letters and papers, and then took a cigar and his travelling cap with the intention of having a quiet smoke in the shrubbery. The night was clear and cold. There was no moon, but the stars were shining brightly. The footways were dry and pleasant to walk on, and Lionel lingered outside for nearly an hour, winding in and out among the maze of walks, and the thick clumps of evergreens, wherever his vagrant footsteps led him. His thoughts were with Edith. He was thinking of the time, so soon to come, when they should pace those pleasant walks together ; when that dim old pile, which looked so majestic in the starlight, should call her mistress. There would be their home through all the happy years to come. His heart was full of solemn joy and gratitude : unbidden tears stood in his eyes : he felt that Heaven had been very kind to him. Then and there he registered a promise that the sick, the aged, and the poverty-stricken on his estate—and he knew already that they were many in number—should be made the special care of Edith and himself.

He was slowly retracing his steps when, as he turned the corner of a thick clump of holly only a few yards from the house, to his utter surprise he nearly stumbled over a man, who started up, from under his very feet as it seemed, and plunged at once into the depths of the shrubbery on the other side. For the moment Lionel was too much startled to think of pursuit, and a second thought convinced him that it would be useless to attempt any. The trees were thickly planted just there, and that part of the grounds was quite strange to him ; besides, would it be worth his while to follow the intruder ? The man, whoever he might be, had evidently been hiding, and had certainly no business there ; but, in all probability, he was merely some young fellow from the village who had been sweetheating with one of the servants at the Hall, and had stayed beyond his time.

Nevertheless, when Lionel reached the house, he decided that, for once, he would look after the fastenings of the windows and doors himself. When he had satisfied himself that everything was secure, he took his candle and went off to his bed in the *Dolphin*. He was very tired and soon fell asleep. But Lionel had a trick—begotten of the time when he lay camping out in the wilds of North America, and had to sleep with his loaded rifle resting on his arm, and in constant dread of a surprise by hostile Indians—of waking up at the slightest noise at all out of the common way : waking up in a moment, completely, fully, and with all his wits about him. The old instinct did not desert him on the present occasion. He had been asleep for a couple of hours or so, when he was recalled in a moment from the land of dreams to life the most vivid and conscious, by the overturning of some heavy

piece of furniture in the room immediately over that in which he was sleeping. He sat up in bed and listened with all his senses on the alert. But all was again as silent as the grave.

After two or three minutes he lay back in bed, still listening, but not so keenly as before ; and trying to make out, from his knowledge of the house, which particular room it was from whence the noise proceeded that he had just heard.

All at once it struck him—and the thought sent a chill through his heart—that the room in question was none other than the Griffin—none other, in fact, than the room in which his Uncle Arthur had died. The more he thought of it, the more certain he felt that he was right. It was the Griffin without doubt. But what could any living being be doing in that room of all others, and at that hour of the night ? The room had been left untouched since his uncle's death, and, as far as he, Lionel, was concerned, was likely to be so left for some time to come.

It was always kept locked, too, although the key was not taken away but left outside the door ; and all the servants, from Mrs. Benson downwards, had a superstitious dread of entering it. How, then, account for the noise he had heard, which certainly came from that room and from no other ? With such thoughts in his mind, to sleep again, for some time to come, was out of the question. A quarter of an hour, or it might be twenty minutes, passed thus, and the silence was still unbroken. Then there came a sound, and Lionel started involuntarily as he heard it. It was the faint sound of footsteps—the noise made by some one moving slowly and cautiously across the floor of the room above. It was so faint, so muffled, so subdued, that at any other time than the middle of the night, and to any ears less keen than those now listening with all their might, it would have been altogether inaudible. If, for a moment, he had shivered at the recollection that it was in that very room his uncle had breathed his last—if, for a moment, some vague ghostly fancies had flitted across his mind, it was for a moment only. Involuntarily, and without any consciousness on his part, his mind seemed, in some strange way, to connect the dim half-seen figure that had melted before his eyes into the shrubbery, with the mysterious footsteps overhead.

It was the work of a very short time for Lionel to slip out of bed, light his candle, and partially dress himself. He had no weapon of any kind in his room, but, man against man, he was not afraid of anyone ; and that there was more than one person up stairs seemed highly improbable. He opened his room door as noiselessly as possible, and stole out into the corridor. He had to traverse one long passage, ascend a flight of stairs, and there, at the end of another passage, was the door of the room he was in quest of.

It was the state bed-room of the house, this room called the Griffin. None of the rooms near it were occupied : the servants all slept in the

opposite wing. Had Lionel slept in his own room that night, the unknown intruder would have had one whole wing of Park Newton entirely to himself—a fact that was probably well-known and calculated upon. Along the chilly corridor and up the oaken staircase, lighted candle in hand, stole Lionel step by step, slowly and without noise. At the top of the staircase he paused and listened. Two or three minutes passed in silence the most profound. Had not his senses deceived him? he asked himself. Was it, indeed, the sound of mortal footsteps that he had heard? or nothing more than some of the vague, unaccountable noises, born of night and the darkness—moans, whispers, the creaking of doors, the rustling of ghostly garments—such as may be heard during the mute hours of sleep in any old house in which several generations of people have lived and died?

Some such thoughts as these were wandering through his mind—he was still listening intently—when the candle he was carrying dropped down into the socket, flared up suddenly for a moment, and then went out. Stooping to place the candlestick on the ground, and turning his head as he did so, what was his surprise to see a thin, faint streak of light shining from under the door at the end of the corridor! The sight of this braced his nerves like a tonic. A few swift strides brought him to the other end of the passage. It was the work of a moment to turn the key and fling wide open the door.

The late Mr. St. George's bedroom was a large but gloomy apartment, panelled with black oak, and having in one corner a huge funereal-looking bedstead, plumed and carved, and with a quantity of faded gilding about it, that matched well with the faded colours of the painted ceiling overhead. When Lionel flung open the door, an exclamation of surprise burst involuntarily from his lips. The cloaked figure of a man, with his back towards Lionel, and holding a dark lantern in one hand, was standing in front of a small cupboard or recess in the panelling—a hiding place evidently; but what he was doing there Lionel had not time to see. A moment later and the lantern was shut, and he and the stranger were alone in the dark.

As Lionel sprang forward to seize him, the stranger turned to fly. As he did so, there was a noise of money falling to the floor. Lionel seized him by the cloak, but that came away in his hands. Then he grasped him again, this time by the shoulder, and held him firmly. With a growl like that of a wild beast suddenly trapped, the stranger turned on Lionel, and before the latter could guess what he was about, or could defend himself in any way, he jerked his right arm free, and swinging it round with all his strength, brought the butt-end of the pistol, which it held, crashing down on Lionel's head. Twice in quick succession was the terrible blow repeated, and then Lionel fell heavily to the ground and remembered nothing more.

(To be continued.)

BREAKFAST WITH THE CASUALS.

AN invitation to a breakfast at which we are to meet eight hundred guests takes us to Gray's Yard on the first Sunday of the New Year. This locality is known to few, though situated in the heart of West End London. It is but a stone's throw, so to say, from Portman Square. Walking down Lower Seymour Street and James Street, we reach an archway, beyond which we see a dense crowd, attracted thither by the summons that brings us. We join them, and find that they are besieging the door of the house of reception. What a crowd it is ! Not "motley," for little colour shows, since all is sombre grey and black. A ragged crowd, gathered for a Ragged Breakfast ! The title may be just and suggestive, but oh, how sad !

One bit of coloured respectability somehow opens a passage, and we are admitted. As we make our way up three flights of stairs, we are greeted by glad sounds of hymns. At the top of the house, we find ourselves in what is emphatically called a Ragged Church. It is so densely crowded that we reach the pulpit-platform with difficulty. The congregation are singing a hymn, accompanied by a gentleman on the harmonium, and each holds a printed sheet of hymns in his hand. One such is given to us, and we glance from it to the scene before us.

It is an "upper room, furnished and prepared," such as may have been the one in which our blessed Lord partook of His Last Supper. It embraces the whole upper story, is ventilated by seven large windows on one side, and has an ecclesiastically raftered roof. Spanning this roof and the length of the room, at intervals, are leaf-wreathed, crimson-grounded texts, or rather one verse of the 9th chapter of Isaiah, subdivided. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given ; and the government shall be upon his shoulder : and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

On the walls are other short texts, warning against sin, entreating to repentance, and encouraging to hope. All are artistically worked and arranged. Beneath a clock in the centre is a hand with its finger pointing upwards to the motto "Time flies."

It is, indeed, already half-past ten, and few of the three hundred and twenty-two men before us have broken fast this New Year's Sabbath. Yet most of them sing heartily and not untunefully. They must have learnt that hymn in Auld Lang Syne—these now weary, sin-soiled, hunger-stricken human beings. It ceases, and they sit down. It surprises us to remark—having read much to the contrary—that the expression of their faces is rather dejected than brutal, rather stolid

than hardened. Here and there only we think to see the felon-mark. Some care has been bestowed to coax the neglected hair into neatness, and most of the faces are clean. They are so close together that we cannot see the "rags," and but for previous information, these pauper casuals, as they are called, would have appeared to us an ordinary congregation of the poor. But we scarcely observe a speck of white amongst them : for their coats are buttoned to the chin to atone for the deficiency of the unknown luxury of shirt or collar.

While making these brief observations, Mr. Frank Bevan, the President, inaugurates the addresses, speaking himself discreetly and fraternally. We use the word advisedly, for how could he reach the hearts of these sad people but by addressing them as brother to brother? We hear him call, by turns, on the Rev. Mr. Moore, Mr. Hanbury, Sir Thomas Chambers, and Mr. Denham Smith, to speak to these, their brethren in Christ. And as sermon follows sermon, each earnest preacher discourses from heart to heart. Words that burn, entreaties, promises, sympathies, fall on those dull ears, and quicken them to listening. One poor fellow, who has kept his face covered with his long, grimy hands, removes them to dash away his tears. He must have seen better days, and a different society. It is said that there is more than one, formerly of good position, and many of good education, amongst these our fallen brothers. God help them! We see many tears, glistening in this bright New Year sunshine, called forth by chance allusions to a mother's prayers, an innocent boyhood, or the crowning theme, a Saviour's Sacrifice. The deep well of feeling is reached, and let us be thankful it is not dry.

The hungry souls listen with unwearied attention. Either reports exaggerate or the "ragged" improve ; for the well-clad could scarcely seem more devout. When the last speaker winds up with the announcement of the coming meal, and "A Happy New year to you all," he is answered by a quiet "Thank'ee, sir.—The same to you, sir," which sounds more like the chant of a penitential psalm than a thanksgiving. Another hymn and the blessing, and the breakfast begins in earnest.

Fumes of coffee and cocoa wind in agreeably : the ladies who have volunteered as helpers receive paper bags of food from their male aids and distribute them, and in time, each white mug is filled. The guests wait with a patient, immovable endurance and we wonder if they are really hungry. Our curiosity surpasses theirs, for we inquire the contents of the bags of one who, waiting for the coffee, has not opened it. It is well repaid, however. Each neatly folded parcel contains a meat pie of about a pound's weight, two thick slices of bread-and-butter, a half-pound currant bun, and an orange.

Yes, they are hungry ! for they set to work with a will at last. But as a rule, they do not eat greedily, but pause to answer our questions and to volunteer remarks.

Here are a dozen young men in one row eager to talk, it would seem. One poor fellow is all rags, hollow-faced and unkempt. His foot is swathed in linen, and he says he cannot work because he is ill. He has neither home nor friends. His neighbour is similarly circumstanced. The next has come up from Birmingham in search of work. "I am a printer by trade," he says, "but my sight is bad, and I lost my place. I thought to get something to do in London, but it is full already." Another, intelligent-looking and well-spoken, pours out his complaint, and seems so honest we are fain to believe him, in spite of the "cunningly devised fables" of his class.

"I have fallen, and once down 'tis hard to get up again. I want to begin to be religious this new year, and I can't; for I must tell a dozen lies to get a bed to-night—and how can one be religious and tell lies? I must go to the workhouse to sleep, and say I come from where I don't, slept last night where I didn't, to be let in. Then to-morrow morning they'll keep me picking oakum till eleven o'clock, too late for a day's work. If I try to get sent out as an emigrant, they say I'm not strong enough. I wish good people would form a society to show such as we how to emigrate, and help us. I mean to set out for the Yorkshire mines to-morrow, two hundred miles—but by the time I'm there, I shall be so tired and look so bad that they won't employ me. And I've got no boots."

Mr. Edmunds, the zealous honorary-secretary being near, we turn inquiringly to him, and learn that could funds be procured for a dépôt of cast-off clothing, difficulties such as these could occasionally be remedied. He also confirms the statement concerning emigration, adding, that not long since he was requested to select ten able-bodied men from amongst his casuals who would emigrate. He found them readily, and took them to the appointed place; but they were rejected because *they had never been in prison!*

Leaving the men to their rare enjoyment of a breakfast, we go down, stairs to a room filled with women. Here the addresses by Miss Stewart and other ladies, together with the meal, are over, so we can only try to consider the effect produced. It must be favourable, for the poor souls look almost cheerful. If to be warm is to be happy, they are happy for once in their weary lives. Women are more easily comforted than men, and they respond emphatically to our good wishes and inquiries as they rise to depart. "We have had a good word from the lady," says one. "And a capital breakfast," another. "God bless the ladies and gentlemen," a third. Most of them are carrying away a portion of the provisions, for the children—we were about to say at home—but, as one forlorn-looking woman assures us, they have no home. And so they leave their hospitable entertainers with "God bless you—and 'A Happy New Year."

Another room and yet another crowded to excess, where we hear of

Dr. Habershon and Mr. Chadwick, as chairmen, and other philanthropic gentlemen as aids. They are still talking to their no longer famished guests, who seem content to sit on while they may.

We make little ventures with one and another on the subject of work. "I gets a bit when I can, but the days is short now." "It have been a mild winter, and that helps us through, but as the days grows longer, the cold grows stronger." "I haven't had none for a fortnight." "We'd work and be thankful if we could get it," are samples of the replies. The men are certainly more dejected than the women, and we notice two amongst them quite blind.

That many of them would work if they could is even admitted by the kindly though sceptical policeman at whose side we find ourselves at last to watch the egress of the multitude—to see eight hundred and twenty, mostly houseless, wanderers return to the dens whence they came. As they leave the door, each receives a small copy of one of the gospels, presented by a good friend of the cause, and we hear one woman say, "I've got St. Luke this year, I had St. John last; that's lucky." All open, and glance with a strange curiosity into the tiny treasure, numbers unconscious of its meaning. We have not realized until now their actual condition. Seated in masses, they did not look so different from the rest of us; but as they walk through the yard by twos and threes, their rags, dirty finery, bedabbled skirts, and utter wretchedness, become only too apparent. "Walk" is scarcely an apt word; their gait is, as the late Dr. Guthrie expressed it in his touching description of a sunday service he held here not long before his death, "a feckless shuffling." They shamble along like rickety machines, as if their legs were not made to support their bodies. One here and there may be said to walk, and he, the policeman tells us, has been pretty surely a soldier. The eyes that were fixed with such a steady light, awhile since, on the preachers become shy and suspicious as they glance round. Yet the grateful gleam returns to them as they respond awkwardly to our "good-byes." The unexpressed gratitude for a kind word is more painful than speech.

Surely there is no end to this stream of wretchedness! No sooner has it apparently flowed out than another meets it and flows in. A little crowd, "too late" for the breakfast, or unprovided with tickets, have been waiting with dogged patience, two good hours at the door. They are invited in when the rooms are cleared, and are furnished with the welcome bags of edibles. But there is nothing to drink! Although one gentleman provided a thousand cups of cocoa, in addition to the ample supply of coffee, not a drop remains. A miserable, wan, tattered youth says, as he returns our greeting, "There's no drink left, and I be so cold!" He takes the little gospel instead, and humbly passes on. May it prove a "fountain of living water" to him.

While the second lesser stream slowly drifts back again, we pause to

survey the building. It is of substantial brick, raised, we are informed, where a cow-house, surmounted by a dwelling, once stood. Although this good work has been in progress since 1835, it has only been carried on here during the last year or so. And what a work it is. Hither come Sunday after Sunday, five or six hundred men and women, in search of food both for soul and body. Of these "waifs and strays," as it is the fashion to call them, few come twice. If one tide drifts them here, another carries them to a distant shore, and so they float hither and thither on the turbid ocean of this our metropolis.

But they are not the only refuse of our streets made welcome in this house. Sunday and weekly schools invite alike infant and adult, and are well attended. Here, also, are Bible, singing, and sewing classes, prayer meetings, Dorcas, maternal and pure-literature societies, a penny bank and library—and beyond all, a Sunday Rest Union, and Band of Hope.

Who shall say that evil outweighs good in this vast wilderness of London? Institutions arise to meet every upspring need. But of all needs, none is greater than that of raising the abject from despair, and bringing the soul-blind from darkness to light. This was Christ's work on earth—this is the work of Gray's Yard Ragged Church and School. They need help. Let all help them who can.

ANNE BEALE.



THE LOVERS' HOUR.

BY MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS.

WHEN the evening sun goes down, and the daisies close their eyes ;
Ere dusk wrinkles to a frown, or the stars blink in the skies ;
When the dew and zephyrs light woo the perfume from the flower,
When the day is meeting night is the lovers' hour.

Gloaming is the trysting time ; hardest outlines soften then ;
Common mortals grow sublime ; love and twilight soften men.
Feelings hidden from the light shrink not to assert their power,
And when day is wooing night is the lovers' hour.

Twilight veils with kindly grace blushes burning on the cheek,
When the timid upturned face coyly answers eyes that speak ;
Lip meets lip, its troth to plight, rapture keen is love's sweet dower ;
Then,—when day is kissing night is the lovers' hour.

PITCHLEY'S FARM.

IT stood on the left-hand side of the road as you went towards Alcester : a good looking, red brick house, not large, but very substantial. Everything about it was in trim order ; from the emerald-green outer venetian window-blinds to the handsome iron entrance gates between the enclosing palisades ; and the garden and grounds had not as much as a stray worm upon them. Mr. Brandon was nice and particular in all matters, as old bachelors mostly are ; and he was especially so in regard to his home.

Careering up to this said house on the morning of a fine spring day, when the green hedges were budding and the birds sang in the trees, went a pony gig, driven by a gentleman. A tall, slender young fellow of seven-and-twenty, with golden hair that shone in the sun and eyes as blue and bright as the sky. Leaving the pony to be taken care of by a labouring boy who chanced to be loitering about, he rang the bell at the iron gates, and inquired of the answering servant whether Mr. Brandon was at home.

"Yes, sir," was the answer of the man, as he led the way in. "But I am not sure that he can see you. What name?" And the applicant carelessly took a card from his waistcoat pocket, and was left in the drawing-room. Which card the servant glanced at as he carried it away.

"Mr. Francis Radcliffe."

People say there's sure to be a change every seven years. Seven years had gone by since the death of old Mr. Radcliffe and the inheritance by Francis of the portion that fell to him ; three hundred a year. There were odd moments when Frank, in spite of himself, would look back at those seven years ; and he did not at all like the retrospect. For he remembered the solemn promise he had made to his mother when she was dying, to put away those evil habits which had begun to creep upon him, more especially that worst of all bad habits that man, whether young or old, can take to—*drinking*—and he had not kept the promise. He had been called to the Bar in due course, but he made nothing by his profession. Briefs did not come to him. He just wasted his time and lived a fast life on the small means that were his. He pulled up sometimes, turned his back on folly, and read like a house on fire : but his wild companions soon got hold of him again, and put his good resolutions to flight. Frank put it all down to idleness. "If I had work to do, I should do it," he said, "and that would keep me straight." But at the close of this last winter he had fallen into a most dangerous illness, resulting from the draughts of ale, and what not, that

he had made too free with, and he got up from it with a resolution never to drink again. Knowing that the resolution would be more easy to keep if he turned his back on London and the companions who beset him, down he came to his native place, determined to take a farm and give up the law. For the second time in his life some money had come to him unexpectedly ; which would help him on. And so, after a seven years' fling, Frank Radcliffe was going in for a change.

He had never stayed at Sandstone Torr since his father's death. His brother Stephen's surly temper, and perhaps that curious warning of his mother's, kept him out of it. He and Stephen maintained a show of civility to one another ; and when Frank was in the neighbourhood (but that had only happened twice in the seven years), he would call at the Torr and see them. The last time he came down, Frank was staying at a place popularly called Pitchley's farm. Old Pitchley—who had lived on it, boy and man, for seventy years—liked him well. Frank made acquaintance that time with Annet Skate ; fell in love with her, in fact, and meant to marry her. She was a pretty girl, and a good girl, and had been brought up to be thoroughly useful as a farmer's daughter : but neither by birth nor position was she the equal of Frank Radcliffe. All her experience of life lay in her own secluded, plain home : in regard to the world outside she was as ignorant as a young calf, and just as mild and soft as butter.

So Frank, after his spell of sickness and reflection, had thrown up London, and come down to settle in a farm with Annet, if he could get one. But there was not a farm to be let for miles round. And it was perhaps a curious thing that while Frank was thinking he should have to travel elsewhere in search of one, Pitchley's should turn up. For old Pitchley suddenly died. Pitchley's farm belonged to Mr. Brandon. It was a small compact farm ; just the size Frank wanted. A large one would have been beyond his means.

Mr. Brandon sat writing letters at the table in his library, in his geranium-coloured Turkish cap, with its purple tassel, when his servant went in with the card.

"Mr. Francis Radcliffe !" read he aloud, in his squeaky voice. "What, is he down here again ! You can bring him in, Abel—though I'm sure I don't know what he wants with me." And Abel went and brought him.

"We heard you were ill, young man," said Mr. Brandon, peering up into Frank's handsome face as he shook hands, and detecting all sorts of sickly signs in it.

"So I have been, Mr. Brandon ; very ill. But I have left London and its dissipations for good, and have come here to settle. It's about time I did," he added, with the open candour natural to him.

"I should say it was," coughed old Brandon. "You've been on the wrong tack long enough."

"And I have come to you—I hope I am first in the field—to ask you to let me have the lease of Pitchley's farm."

Mr. Brandon could not have felt more surprised had Frank asked for a lease of the world, but he did not show it. His head went up a little, and the purple tassel took a sway backwards.

"Oh," said he. "You take Pitchley's farm! How do you think to stock it?"

"I shall take to the stock at present on it, as far as my means will allow, and give a bond for the rest. Pitchley's executors will make it easy for me."

"What are your means?" curtly questioned old Brandon.

"In all, they will be two thousand pounds. Taking mine and Miss Skate's together."

"That's a settled thing, is it, Master Francis!"—alluding to the marriage.

"Yes, it is," said Frank. "Her portion is just a thousand pounds, and her friends are willing to put it on the farm. Mine is another thousand."

"Where does yours come from?"

"Do you recollect, Mr. Brandon, that when I was a little fellow at school I had a thousand pounds left me by a clergyman—a former friend of my grandfather Elliot?"

Mr. Brandon nodded. "It was Parson Godfrey. He came down once or twice to the Torr to see your mother and you."

"Just so. Well, his widow has now recently died; she was very considerably younger than he; and she has left me another thousand. If I can have Pitchley's farm, I shall be sure to get on at it," he added in his sanguine way. For, if ever there was a sanguine, sunny natured fellow in this world, it was Frank Radcliffe.

Old Brandon pushed his geranium cap all aside and gave a flick to the tassel. "My opinion lies the contrary way, young man: that you will be sure not to get on at it."

"I understand all about farming," said Frank eagerly. "And I mean to be as steady as steady can be."

"To begin with a debt on the farm will cripple the best man going, sir."

"Oh, Mr. Brandon, don't turn against me!" implored Frank, who was feeling terribly in earnest. "Give me a chance! Unless I can get some constant work, some *interest* to occupy my hands and my mind, I might be relapsing back to the old ways again from sheer ennui. There's no resource but a farm."

Mr. Brandon did not seem to be in a hurry to answer. He was looking straight at Frank, and nodding little nods to himself, following out some mental argument. Frank leaned forward in his chair, his voice low, his face solemn.

"When my poor mother was dying, I promised her to give up bad habits, Mr. Brandon. I hope—I think—I fully intend to do so now. Won't you help me?"

"What do you wish me to understand by 'bad' habits, young man?" queried Mr. Brandon in his hardest tone. "What have been yours?"

"Drink," said Frank shortly. "And I am ashamed enough to have to say it. It is not that I have been a constant drinker, or that I have taken *much*, in comparison with what very many men drink, but I have, sometimes for weeks together, taken it very recklessly. *That* is what I meant by speaking of my bad habits, Mr. Brandon."

"Couldn't speak of a worse habit, Frank Radcliffe."

"True. I should have pulled up long ago but for those fast companions I lived amongst. They kept me down. Once amid such, a fellow has no chance. Often and often that neglected promise to my mother has lain upon me, a nightmare of remorse. I have fancied she might be looking down upon earth, upon *me*, and seeing how I was fulfilling it."

"If your mother was not looking down upon you, sir, your Creator was."

"Ay. I know. Mr. Brandon"—his voice sinking deeper in its solemnity, and his eyes glistening—"in the very last minute of my mother's life—when her soul was actually on the wing—she told me that she *knew* I should be helped to throw off what was wrong. She had prayed for it, and seen it. A conviction is within me that I shall be—has been within me ever since. I think this—now—may be the turning point in my life. Don't deny me the farm, sir."

"Frank Radcliffe, I'd let you have the farm, and another to it, if I thought you were sincere."

"Why—you *can't* think me not sincere, after what I have said!" cried Frank.

"Oh, you are sincere enough at the present moment. I don't doubt that. The question is, will you be sincere in keeping your good resolutions in the future."

"I hope I shall. I believe I shall. I will try with all my best energies."

"Very well. You may have the farm."

Frank Radcliffe started up in his joy and gratitude, and shook Mr. Brandon's hands till the purple tassel quivered. He had a squeaky voice and a cold manner, and went in for coughs and chest-aches, and all kinds of fanciful disorders; but there was no more generous heart going than old Brandon's.

Business settled, the luncheon was ordered in. But Frank was a great deal too impatient to stay for it; and drove away in the pony gig to impart the news to all whom it might concern. Taking a round to the Torr first, he drove into the back yard. Stephen came out,

Stephen looked quite old now. He must have been fifty years of age. Hard and surly as ever was he, and his stock of hair was as grizzled as his father's used to be before Frank was born.

"Oh, it's you!" said Stephen, as civilly as he could bring his tongue to speak. "Who's chay and pony is that?"

"It belongs to Pitchley's bailiff. He lent it me this morning."

"Will you come in?"

"I have not time now," answered Frank. "But I thought I'd just drive round and tell you the news, Stephen. I'm going to have Pitchley's farm."

"Who says so?"

"I have now been settling it with Mr. Brandon. At first, he seemed unwilling to let me have it—was afraid, I suppose, that I and the farm might come to grief together—but he consented at last. So I shall get in as soon as I can, and take Annet with me. You'll come to our wedding, Stephen?"

"A fine match *she* is!" cried cranky Stephen.

"What's the matter with her?"

"I don't say as anything's the matter with her. But you have always stuck up for the pride and pomp of the Radcliffes: made out that nobody was good enough for 'em. A nice come-down for Frank Radcliffe that'll be—old Farmer Skate's girl."

"We won't quarrel about it, Stephen," said Frank with his good-humoured smile.—"Here's your wife. How do you do, Mrs. Radcliffe?"

Becca had come out with a wet mop in her hands, which she proceeded to ring. Some of the splashes went on Frank's pony-gig. She wore morning costume: a dark-blue cotton gown hanging straight down on her thin lanky figure; and an old black cap adorning her hard face. It was a great contrast: handsome, gentlemanly, well-dressed, sunny Frank Radcliffe, barrister-at-law; and that surly boor Stephen, in his rough clothes, and his shabby, hard-working wife.

"When be you going back to London?" was Becca's reply to his salutation, as she began to rinse out the mop at the pump.

"Not at all. I have been telling Stephen. I am going into Pitchley's farm."

"Along of Annet Skate," put in Stephen; whose queer phraseology had been indulged in so long that it was become habitual. "Much good they'll do in a farm! He'd like us to go to the wedding!—No, thank ye."

"Well, good morning," said Frank, starting the pony. They did not give him much encouragement to stay.

"Be it true, Radcliffe?" asked Becca, letting the mop alone for a minute. "Be he agoing to marry Skate's girl, and get Pitchley's farm?"

"I wish the devil had him!" was Stephen's surly comment, as he stalked off in the wake of the receding pony-gig, giving his wife no other answer.

No doubt Stephen was sincere in his wish, though it was hardly polite to avow it. For the whole of Frank's life, he had been a thorn in the flesh of Stephen : in the first years, for fear their father should bequeath to Frank a share of the inheritance ; in the later years, because Frank had got the share ! That sum of three hundred a year, enjoyed by Frank, was coveted by Stephen as money was never yet coveted by man. Looking at matters with a distorted mind, he considered it a foul wrong done him ; as no better than a robbery upon him ; that the whole of the money was his own by all the laws of right and wrong, and that not a stiver of it ought to have gone to Frank. Unable, however, to alter the state of existing things he had sincerely hoped that some lucky chance—say the little accident of Frank's drinking himself to death—would put him in possession of it ; and all the rumours that came down from London about Frank's wild life rejoiced him greatly. For if Frank died without children, the money went to Stephen. And it may as well be mentioned here, that old Mr. Radcliffe had so vested the three hundred a year that Frank had no power over the capital and was unable to squander it. It would go to his children when he died ; or, if he left no children, to Stephen.

Never a night when he went to bed, never a morning when he got up, but Stephen Radcliffe's hungry heart gave a dismal groan to that three hundred a year he had been deprived of. In truth, his own poor three hundred was not enough for him. And then, he had expected that the six would all be his ! He had, he said, to work like a slave to keep up the Torr, and make both ends meet. His two children were for ever tugging at his purse-strings. Tom, quitting the sea, had settled in a farm in Canada ; but he was always writing home for help. Lizzy would make her appearance at home at all kinds of unseasonable times ; and tell pitiful stories of the wants of her scanty ménage at Birmingham, and of her little children, and of the poor health and short pay of her husband the curate. Doubtless Stephen had rather a hard life of it and could very well have done with a doubled income. To hear that Frank was going to settle down to a sober existence and to marry a wife, was the worst news of all to Stephen, for it lessened his good chances finely.

But he had only the will to hinder it, not the power. And matters and the year went swimmingly on. Francis entered into possession of the farm ; and just a week before Midsummer Day, he married Annet Skate and took her home.

The red light of the setting sun in June fell full on Pitchley's farm,

staining the windows a glowing crimson. Pitchley's farm lay in a dell, about a mile from Dyke Manor on the opposite side to Sandstone Torr. It was a pretty little homestead, with jessamine on the porch, and roses creeping up the frames of the parlour windows. Just a year had gone by since the wedding, and to-morrow would be the anniversary of the wedding day. Mr. and Mrs. Francis Radcliffe were intending to keep it, and had bidden their friends to an entertainment. He had carried out his resolution to be steady, and they had prospered fairly well. David Skate, one of Annet's brothers, a thorough, practical farmer, was ever ready to come over, if wanted, and help Francis with work and counsel and advice.

Completely tired with her day's exertions, was Annet, for she had been making good things for the morrow, and now sat down for the first time that day in the parlour—a low room, with its windows open to the clustering roses, and the furniture bright and tasty. Annet was of middle height, light and active, with a delicate colour on her cheeks, soft brown eyes, and small features. She had just changed her cotton gown for one of pink summer muslin, and looked as fresh as a daisy.

"Well, I am tired!" she exclaimed to herself, with a smile. "Frank would scold me if he knew it."

"Be you ready for supper, ma'am?" asked a servant, putting in her head. The only maid kept: for both Frank and his wife knew that their best help to getting on was economy.

"Not yet, Sally. I shall wait for your master."

"Well, I've put it on the table, ma'am; and I'm just going to step across now to Hester Bitton's, and tell her she'll be wanted here to-morrow."

Annet went into the porch, and stood there looking out for her husband, shading her eyes with her hand from the red glare. Some business connected with stock took him to Worcester that day, and he had started in the early morning; but Annet had expected him home earlier than this.

There he was, riding down the road at a sharpish trot; Annet heard the horse's hoofs before she saw him. He waved his hand to her in the distance, and she fluttered her white handkerchief back again. Thorpe, the in-door man, appeared to take the horse.

Francis Radcliffe had been changing for the better during the past twelvemonth. Regular habits and regular hours, and a mind healthily occupied, had done great things for him. His face was bright, his blue eyes were clear, and his smile and his voice were alike cheering as he got off the horse and greeted his wife.

"You are late, Frank! It is ever so much past eight."

"Our clocks are fast: I've found that out to-day, Annet. But I could not get back before."

He had gone into the parlour, had kissed her, and was disincumbering

his pockets of various parcels : she helping him. Both were laughing, for there seemed to be no end to them. They contained articles wanted for the morrow : maccaroons, and potted lampreys, and lots of good things.

"Don't say again that I forget your commissions, Annet."

"Never again, Frank dear. How good you are ! But what is in this one ? It feels soft."

"That's for yourself," said Frank. "Open it."

Cutting the string, the paper flew apart, disclosing a baby's cloak of braided white cashmere. Annet laughed and blushed.

"Oh, Frank ! How could you !"

"Why, I heard you say you must get one."

"Yes—but—not just yet. It may not be wanted, you know."

"Stuff ! The thing was in Mrs. What's-her-name's window in High Street, staring passers-by in the face ; so I went in, and bought it."

"It's too beautiful," murmured Annet, putting it reverently into the paper as if she mistook it for a baby. "And how has the day gone, Frank ? Could you buy the sheep ?"

"Yes ; all right. The sheep—Annet, who *do* you think is coming here to-morrow ? Going to honour us as one of the guests ?"

At the breaking off of the sentence, Frank had flung himself into a chair, and thrown his head back, laughing. Annet wondered.

"Stephen ! It's true. He had gone to Worcester after some sheep himself. I asked whether we should have the pleasure of seeing them here, and he curly said that he was coming, but couldn't answer for Mrs. Radcliffe. Had the Pope of Rome told me he was coming, I should not have been more surprised."

"Stephen's wife took no notice of the invitation."

"Writing is not in her line : or in his either. Something must be in the wind, Annet : neither he nor his wife has been inside our door yet."

They sat down to supper, full of chat : as genial married folks always are, after a day's separation. And it was only when the house was at rest, and Annet was lighting the bed-candle, that she remembered a letter lying on the mantel-piece.

"Oh, Frank, I ought to have given it to you at once ; I quite forgot it. This letter came for you by this morning's post."

Frank sat down again, drew the candle to him, and read it. It was from one of his former friends, a Mr. Briarly ; offering on his own part and on that of another former friend, one Pratt, a visit at Pitchley's farm.

Instincts arise to all of us : instincts that it might be well to trust to oftener than we do. A powerful instinct, *against* the offered visit, rushed into the mind of Francis Radcliffe. But the chances are, that, in the obligations of hospitality, it would not have prevailed, even had the chance been afforded him.

"Cool, I must say!" said Frank with a laugh. "Look here, Annet; these two fellows are going to take us by storm to-morrow. If I don't want them, says Briarly, I must just bolt the door in their faces."

"But you'll be glad to see them, won't you, Frank?" she remarked in her innocence.

"Yes. I shall like well enough to see them again. It's our busy time, though: they might have put it off till after harvest."

As many friends went to this entertainment at Pitchley's farm as liked to go. Mr. Brandon was one of them: he walked over with us—with me, and Tod, and the Squire, and the Mater. Stephen Radcliffe and his wife were there, Becca in a black silk with straps of rusty velvet across it. Stephen mostly sat still and said nothing, but Becca's sly eyes were everywhere. Frank and his wife, well dressed and hospitable, welcomed us all; and the board was well spread with cold meats and dainties.

Old Brandon had a quiet talk with Annet in a corner of the porch. He told her he was glad to find Frank seemed likely to do well at the farm.

"He tries his very best, sir," she said.

"Ay. Somehow I thought he would. People said 'Frank Radcliffe has his three hundred a year to fall back upon when he gets out of Pitchley's': but I fancied he might stay at Pitchley's instead of getting out of it."

"We are getting on as well as we can be, sir, in a moderate way."

"A moderate way is the only safe way to get on," said Mr. Brandon, putting his white silk handkerchief corner-wise on his head against the sun. "That's a true saying, He who would be rich in twelve months is generally a beggar in six. You are helping Frank well, my dear. I have heard of it: how industrious you are, and keep things together. It's not often a good old head like yours is set upon young shoulders."

Annet laughed. "My shoulders are not so very young, sir. I was twenty-four last birthday."

"It's young, that, to manage a farm, child. But *you've* had good training; you had an industrious mother"—indicating an old lady on the lawn in a big lace cap and green gown. "I can tell you what—when I let Frank Radcliffe have the lease, I took into consideration that you were coming here as well as he. Why!—who are these?"

Two stylish-looking fellows were dashing up in a dog-cart; pipes in their mouths, and portmanteaus behind them. Shouting and calling indiscriminately about for Frank Radcliffe; for a man to take the horse and vehicle, that they had contrived to charter at the railway terminus; for a glass of bitter beer apiece, for they were confoundedly dry—there was no end of a commotion.

They were the two visitors from London, Briarly and Pratt. Their

tones moderated somewhat when they saw the company. Frank came out; and received a noisy greeting that might have been heard at York. One of them trod on Mr. Brandon's corns as he went in through the porch. Annet looked half frightened.

"Come to stay here!—gentlemen from London!—Frank's former friends!" repeated old Brandon, listening to her explanation. "Fine friends, I should say! Here, Frank Radcliffe,"—laying hold of him as he was coming back from giving directions to his servant—"how came you to bring those men down into your home?"

"They came of their own accord, Mr. Brandon."

"Friends of yours, I hear?"

"Yes, I knew them in the old days."

"Oh. Well—I should not like to go shouting and thundering up to a decent house with more aboard me than I could carry. Those men have both been drinking."

Frank was looking frightfully mortified. "I am afraid they have," he said. "The heat of the day and the dust on the journey must have caused them to take more than they were aware of. I'm very sorry. I assure you, Mr. Brandon, they are really quiet, good fellows."

"May be. But the sooner you see their backs turned, the better, young man."

From that day, the trouble set in. Will it be believed that Frank Radcliffe, after keeping himself straight for ever so much more than a year, fell away again? Those two visitors must have found their quarters at Pitchley's farm agreeable, for they stayed on and on, and made no sign of going away. They were drinkers, hard and fast. They drank, themselves, and they seduced Frank to drink—though perhaps he did not require much seduction. Frank's ale was poured out like water. Dozens of port, ordered and paid for by Briarly, arrived from the wine merchant's; Pratt procured cases of brandy. From morning till night liquor was under poor Frank's nose, tempting him to sin. *Their* heads might be strong enough to stand the potions; Frank's was not. It was June when the new life set in; and on the first of September, when all three staggered in from a day's shooting, Frank was in a fever and curiously trembling from head to foot.

By the end of the week he was strapped down in his bed, a raving madman; Duffham attending him, and two men keeping guard.

Duffham made short work with Briarly and Pratt. He packed them and their cases of wine and their portmanteaus off together; telling them they had done enough mischief for one year, and he must have the house quiet for both its master and mistress. Frank's malady was turning to typhus fever, and a second doctor was called in from Evesham.

The next news was, that Pitchley's farm had a son and heir. They called it Francis. It did not live many days, however: how was a son

and heir likely to live, coming to that house of fright and turmoil? Frank's ravings might be heard all over it; and his poor wife was nearly terrified out of her bed.

The state of things went on. October came in, and there was no change. It was not known whether Annet would live or die. Frank was better in health, but his mind was gone.

"There's one chance for him," said Duffham, coming across to Dyke Manor to the Squire: "and that is, a lunatic asylum. At home he cannot be kept; he is raving mad. No time must be lost in removing him."

"You think he may get better in an asylum?" cried the Squire, gloomily.

"Yes. I say it is his best chance. His wife, poor thing, is horrified at the thought: but there's nothing else to be done. The calmness of an asylum, the sanatory rules and regulations observed there, will restore him, if anything will."

"How is *she*?" asked the Squire.

"About as ill as she can be. She'll not leave her bed on this side Christmas. And the next question is, Squire—where shall he be placed? Of course we cannot act at all without your authority."

The Squire, you see, was Frank Radcliffe's trustee. At the present moment Frank was dead in the eye of the law, and everything lay with the Squire. Not a sixpence of the income could anybody touch now, but as he pleased to decree.

After much discussion, in which Stephen Radcliffe had to take his share, according to law and order, Frank was conveyed to a small private asylum near London. It belonged to a Dr. Dale: and the Evesham doctor strongly recommended it. The terms seemed high to us: £200 a year: and Stephen grumbled at them. But Annet begged and prayed that money might not be spared; and the Squire decided to pay it. So poor Frank was taken to town; and Stephen, as his nearest male relative—in fact, his only one—officially consigned him to the care of Dr. Dale.

And that's the jolly condition things were in, that Christmas, at Pitchley's farm. Its master in a London madhouse, its mistress in her sick bed, and the little heir in Church Dykely churchyard. David Skate, like the good brother he was, took up his quarters at the farm, and looked after things.

It was in January that Annet found herself well enough to get upon her legs. The first use she made of them was to go up to London to see her husband. But the sight of her so much excited Frank that Dr. Dale begged her not to come again. It was, he said, taking from Frank one chance of his recovery. So Annet gave her promise not to do so, and came back to Pitchley's sobbing and sighing.

Things went on without much change till May. News came of

Frank periodically, chiefly to Stephen Radcliffe, who was the recognised authority in Dr. Dale's eyes. On the whole it was good. The improvement in him, though slow, was gradual: and Dr. Dale felt quite certain now of his restoration. In May the cheering tidings arrived that Frank was all but well; and Stephen Radcliffe, who went to London for a fortnight about that time and saw Frank twice, confirmed it.

Stephen's visit up arose in this way. One Esau D. Stettin (that's how he wrote his name), who owned land in Canada, came to this country on business, and brought news to the Torr of Tom Radcliffe. Tom had every chance of doing well, he said, and was quite steady—and this was true. Mr. and Mrs. Stephen were nearly as glad to hear it as if a fortune had been left them; for Tom was just the eye-apple of both. But, to ensure his doing well and to make his farm prosperous, Tom wanted no end of articles sent out to him: the latest improvements in agricultural implements; patent wheelbarrows, and all the rest of it. For Stephen to wring the money out of his pocket to purchase the wheelbarrows, was like wringing the teeth from his head; but as Esau D. Stettin—who was above suspicion—confirmed Tom's need of the things, Stephen decided to do it. He went up to London, to buy the articles and superintend their embarkation, and it was during that time that he saw Frank. Upon returning to the Torr, he fully bore out Dr. Dale's opinion that Frank was recovering his mind, was, in fact, almost well; but he privately told the Squire some other news that qualified it.

Frank's health was failing. While his mind was resuming its tone, his body was wasting. He was, Ste said, a mere shadow; and Dr. Dale feared that he would not last very long after complete sanity set in.

How sorry we all were, I need not say. With all his failings and his instability, everybody liked Frank Radcliffe. They kept it from Annet. She was but a shadow herself: had fretted her bones to fiddlestrings; and Duffham's opinion was that she stood a good chance of dwindling away till nothing was left of her but a shroud and a coffin.

"Would it be of any use, my going up to see him, poor fellow?" asked the Squire, sadly down in the mouth.

"Not a bit," returned Stephen. "Dale would be sure not to admit you: so much depends on Frank's being kept free from excitement. Why, he wanted to deny me, that Dale; but I insisted on my right to go in. I mean to see him again, too, before many days are over."

"Are you going to London again, Mr. Radcliffe?" asked the Squire, rather surprised. It was something new for Stephen Radcliffe to be a gad-about.

"I shall have to go, I reckon," said Stephen, ungraciously. "I've got to see Stettin before he sails."

Stephen Radcliffe did go up again, apparently much against his will, to judge by the ill words he gave to it. And the report he brought back of Frank that time was rather more cheering.

The Squire was standing one hot morning in the yard in his light buff coat, blowing up Dwarf Giles for something that had gone wrong in the stables, when a man was seen making his way from the oak-walk towards the yard. The June hay-making was about, and the smell of the hay was wafted across to us on the wings of the summer breeze.

"Who's that, Johnny?" asked the Pater: for the sun was shining right in his eyes.

"It—it looks like Stephen Radcliffe, sir."

"You may tell him by his rusty suit of velveteen," put in Tod; who stood watching a young brood of ducklings in the duck-pond, and the agonies of the hen that had hatched them.

Stephen Radcliffe it was. He had a stout stick in his hand, and his face was of a curious lead colour. Which, with him, took the place of paleness.

"I've had bad news, Mr. Todhetley," he began, in a low tone, without any preliminary greeting. "Frank's dead."

The Squire's straw hat, which he chanced to have taken off, dropped on the stones. "Dead! Frank!" he exclaimed in an awe-struck tone. "It can't be true."

"Just the first thought that struck me when I opened the letter," said Stephen, drawing one from his pocket. "Here it is, though, in black and white."

His hands shook like anything as he held out the letter. It was from one of the assistants at Dale's—a Mr. Pitt: the head doctor, under Dale, Stephen explained. Frank had died suddenly, it stated, without warning of any kind, so that there was no possibility of apprising his friends: and it requested Mr. Radcliffe to go up without delay.

"It is a dreadful thing!" cried the Squire.

"So it is, poor fellow," agreed Stephen. "I never thought it was going to be ended this way; not yet awhile, at any rate. For him, it's a happy release, I suppose. He'd never ha' been good for anything."

"What has he died of?" questioned Tod.

The voice, or the question, seemed to startle Stephen. He looked sharply round, as if he'd not known Tod was there, an ugly scowl on his face.

"I expect we shall hear it was heart disease," he said, facing the Squire and putting his back to Tod.

"Why do you say that, Mr. Radcliffe? Was anything the matter with his heart?"

"Dale had some doubts of it, Squire. He thought that was the cause of his wasting away."

"You never told us that."

"Because I never believed it. A Radcliffe never had a weak heart yet. And it's only a thought o' mine: he might have died from something else. Laid hands on himself, may be."

"For goodness' sake don't bring up such an ill thought as that, Stephen Radcliffe," cried the Pater explosively. "Wait till you know."

"Yes, I must wait till I know," said Stephen, sullenly. "And a precious inconvenience it is to me to go up at this moment when my hay's just cut! Frank's been a bother to me all his life, and he must even be a bother now he's dead."

"Shall I go up for you?" asked the Squire: who in his distress at the sudden news would have thought nothing of offering to start for Kamschatka.

"No good if you did," growled Stephen, folding up the letter that the Pater handed back to him. "They'd not as much as release him to be buried, Dale's lot, without me, I expect. I shall bring him down here," added Stephen, jerking his head sideways in the direction of the churchyard.

"Yes, yes, poor fellow—let him lie by his mother," said the Squire.

Stephen said a good Morrow, meant for the whole of us; and had rounded the duck-pond on his exit, when he stopped, and turned back again to the Pater.

"There'll be extra expenses, I suppose, up at Dale's. Have I your authority to discharge them?"

"Of course you have, Mr. Radcliffe. Or let Dale send in the account to me, if you prefer it."

He went off without another word, his head down; his fat stick held over his shoulder. The Squire rubbed his face, and wondered what on earth was the next thing to do in this unhappy crisis.

Annet was in Wales with her mother at some seaside place. It would be a dreadful shock to her. Getting the address from David Skate, the Squire wrote to break it to them in the best manner he could. But now, a mischance happened to that letter. Welsh names are difficult to spell; the Pater's pen put L for Y, or X for Z, something of that kind; and the letter went to a wrong town altogether, and finally came back to him unopened. Stephen Radcliffe had returned then.

Stephen did not keep his word. Instead of bringing Frank down, he left him in London in Finchley Cemetery. "The heat of the weather," he pleaded by way of excuse when the Squire blew him up. "There was some delay; an inquest, and all that; and unless we'd gone to the expense of lead, it couldn't be done; Dale said so. What does it signify? He'll lie as quiet there as he would here."

"And was it the heart that was wrong?" asked the Pater.

"No. It was what they called 'effusion on the brain,'" replied Stephen. "Dale says it's rather a common case with lunatics, but he never feared it for Frank."

"It is distressing to think his poor wife did not see him. Quite a misfortune."

"Well, we can't help it: it was no fault of ours," retorted Stephen: who had actually had the decency to put himself into a semblance of mourning. "The world ud go on different for many of us, Squire, if we could foresee things."

And that was the end of Francis Radcliffe!

"Finchley Cemetery!" exclaimed Mr. Brandon, when he heard it. "That Stephen Radcliffe has been at his stingy tricks again. You can bury people for next to nothing there."

Poor Annet came home in her widow's weeds. In health she was better; and might get strong in time. There was no longer any suspense: she knew the worst; that was in itself a rest. The great doubt to be encountered now was, whether she could keep on Pitchley's farm. Mr. Brandon was willing to risk it: and David Skate took up his abode at the farm for good, and would do his best in all ways. But the three hundred a year income, that had been the chief help and stay of her and Frank, was gone.

It had lapsed to Stephen. Nothing could be said against that in law, for old Mr. Radcliffe's will had so decreed it; but it seemed a very cruel thing for every shilling to leave her, an injustice, a wrong. The tears ran down her pale face as she spoke of it one day at Pitchley's to the Squire: and he, going in wholesale for sympathy, determined to have a tussel with Stephen.

"You can't *for shame* take it all from her, Stephen Radcliffe," said the Squire, after walking over to Sandstone Torr the next morning. "You must not leave her quite penniless."

"I don't take it from her," replied Stephen, rumpling up his grizzled hair. "It comes to me of right. It is my own."

"Now don't quibble, Stephen Radcliffe," said the Squire, rubbing his face, for he went into a fever as usual over his argument, and the day was hot. "The poor thing was your brother's wife, and you ought to consider that."

"Francis was a fool to marry her. An unsteady man like him always is a fool to marry."

"Well, he did marry her: and I don't see that he was a fool at all for it. I wish I'd got the whip-hand of those two wicked blades who came down here and turned him from his good ways! I wonder how they'll answer for it in heaven."

"Would you like to take a drop of cider?" asked Stephen.

"I don't care if I do."

The cider was brought in by Eunice Gibbon: a second edition, so

far as looks went, of Mrs. Stephen Radcliffe, whose younger sister she was. She lived there as servant, the only one kept. Holt had left when old Mr. Radcliffe died.

"Come, Stephen Radcliffe, you must make Annet some allowance," said the Squire, after taking a long draught and finding the cider uncommonly sour. "The neighbours will cry out upon you if you don't."

"The neighbours can do as they choose."

"Just take this much into consideration. If that little child of theirs had lived, the money would have been his."

"But he didn't live," argued Stephen.

"I know he didn't—more's the pity. He'd have been a consolation to her, poor thing. Come! you can't, I say, take all from her and leave her with nothing."

"Nothing! Hasn't she got the farm-stock and the furniture? She's all that to the good. 'Twas bought with Frank's money."

"No, it was not. Half the money was hers. Look here. Unless she get's help somewhere, I don't see how she is to stay on at Pitchley's."

"And 'twould be a sight better for her not to stay on at Pitchley's," retorted Stephen. "Let her go back to her mother's again, over in t'other parish. Or let her emigrate. Lots of folks is emigrating now."

"This won't do, Stephen Radcliffe," said the Squire, beginning to lose his temper. "You can't for shame bring everybody down upon your head. Allow her a trifle, man, out of the income that has lapsed to you: let the world have to say that you are generous for once."

Well, not to pursue the contest—which lasted, hot and sharp, for a couple of hours, for the Squire, though he kept getting out of one passion into another, would not give in—I may as well say at once that Stephen at last yielded, and agreed to allow her fifty pounds a year. "Just for a year or so," as he ungraciously put it, "while she turned herself round."

And it was so tremendous a concession for Stephen Radcliffe that nobody believed it at first, the Squire included. It must be intended as a thanksgiving for his brother's death, said the world.

"Only, Ste Radcliffe is not the one to offer thanksgivings," observed old Brandon. "Take care that he pays it, Squire."

And thus things fell into the old grooves again, and the settling down of Frank Radcliffe among us seemed but as a very short episode in Church Dykely life. Stephen Radcliffe, in funds now, bought an adjoining field that was to be sold, and added it to his land; but he and his wife and the Torr kept themselves more secluded than ever. Frank's widow took up her old strength by degrees, and worked and managed incessantly: she in the house, and David Skate out of it; to keep Pitchley's Farm together. And the autumn drew on.

The light of the moon streamed in slantwise upon us as we sat round

the bay-window. Tod and I had just got home for the Michaelmas holidays: and we sat talking after dinner in the growing dusk. There was always plenty to relate, on getting home from school. A dreadful thing had happened this last quarter: one of the younger ones had died at a game of Hare and Hounds. I'll tell you of it sometime. The tears glistened in Mrs. Todhetley's eyes, and we all seemed to be talking at once.

"Mrs. Francis Radcliffe, ma'am."

Old Thomas had opened the door and interrupted us. Annet came in quietly, and sat down after shaking hands all round. Her face looked pale and troubled. We asked her to stay tea; but she would not.

"It is late to come in," she said, some apology in her tone. "I meant to have been here earlier; but it has been a busy day, and I have had interruptions besides."

This seemed to imply that she had come over for some special purpose. Not another word, however, did she say. She just sat in silence, or next door to it: answering Yes and No in an abstracted kind of manner when spoken to, and staring out into the moonlight like anybody dreaming. And presently she got up to leave.

We went out with her and walked across the field; the Pater, I, and Tod. Nearly every blade of the short grass could be seen as distinctly as in the day. At the first stile she halted, saying she expected to meet David there, who had gone on to Dobbs the blacksmith on some errand connected with the horses.

Tod saw a young hare scutter across the grass, and rushed after it, full chase. The moon, low in the heavens, as autumn moons mostly are, lighted up the perplexity on Annet's face. It was perplexed. Suddenly she turned it on the Squire.

"Mr. Todhetley, I am sure you must wonder what I came for."

"Well, I thought you wanted something," said the Squire candidly. "We are always pleased to have you; you ought to have stayed tea."

"I did want something. But I really could not muster enough courage to begin upon it. The longer I sat there—like a statue, as I felt—the more my tongue failed me. Perhaps I can say it here."

It was a curious thing she had to tell, and must have sounded to the Squire's ears like a tale out of a ghost story. The gist of it was this: an impression had taken hold of her mind that her husband had not been fairly dealt with. In plain words, had not come fairly by his end. The Pater listened, and could make no sense of it.

"I can't tell how or when the idea arose," she said; "it seems to have floated in my mind so long that I do not trace the beginning. At first it was but the merest shadow of a doubt; hardly that; but it has grown deeper and darker, and I cannot rest for it."

"Bless my heart!" cried the Squire. "Johnny, hold my hat a minute."

"Just as sure as that I see that moon in the sky, sir," she went on, "do I seem to see in my mind that some ill was wrought to Frank by his brother. Mrs. Radcliffe said it would be."

"Dear me! What Mrs. Radcliffe?"

"Frank's mother. She had the impression of it when she was dying, and she warned Frank that it would be so."

"Poor Selina! But—my dear lady, how do you know that?"

"My husband told me. He told me one night when we were sitting alone in the parlour. Not that he put faith in it. He had escaped Stephen's toils until then, he said in a joking tone, and thought he could take care of himself and escape them still. But I fear he did not."

"Now what is it you do fear?" asked the Squire. "Come."

She glanced round in dread, and then spoke with considerable hesitation and in a low whisper.

"I fear—that Stephen—may have—murdered him."

"Mercy upon us!" uttered the Squire, recoiling a step or two.

She put her elbow on the stile and raised her hand to her face, showing out so pale and distressed under its white net border.

"It lies upon me, sir—a great agony. I don't know what to do."

"But it *could not be*," cried the Squire, collecting his scared senses. "Your imagination must run away with you, child. Frank died up at Dr. Dale's; Stephen Radcliffe was down here at the time."

"Yes—I am aware of all that, sir. But—I believe it was as I fear. I don't pretend to account for it; to say what Stephen did or how he did it—but my fears are dreadful. I have no peace night or day."

The Squire stared at her and shook his head. I am sure he thought her brain was touched.

"My dear Mrs. Frank, this must be pure fancy. Stephen Radcliffe is a hard and gripping man, not sticking at a trick or two where his pocket is concerned, but he'd not do such a thing as this. No, no; surly as he may be, he could not be guilty of murder."

She took her elbow off the stile, with a short shiver. David Skate came into sight; Tod's footsteps were heard brushing the grass.

"Good night, sir," she hurriedly said; and was over the stile before we could help her.

And I hope to give you the upshot next month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

A NIGHT IN A MONASTERY.

By the Author of "A MONTH AT GASTEIN."

THE Monastery of the Grande Chartreuse has been called an ugly building. Perhaps it has small claim to architectural beauty; but at the moment you first look upon it you cannot think of this. You are only struck by the unfamiliar aspect of the structure; by the fact of so extensive a pile rearing itself at this distance from the world; so far up this long steep pass so difficult of access; existing lonely and alone amidst the solemn, silent, everlasting hills.

The desolation of the spot strikes upon you with almost terror. It is a species of life in death; as it were, a living tomb: a habitation for men where men ought not to be; where nothing ought to be but the mountains themselves with their sad companions the pine trees, through which the winds go sighing and southing as if chanting a perpetual requiem for the living-death tragedy that is ever being enacted there. In a moment the mind reverts to the men who are passing away their lives in this tomb—dead not to the world only, but almost dead to themselves and to each other, as far as all friendly intercourse is concerned.

You are transported into a fresh world. What can be the thoughts and inward experiences—such of them as possess thought—of these monks, living amidst this profound, unbroken solitude? Do any of them die out of themselves, losing their own identity in this inactive life? Do any become morbid, melancholy, insane, from the reaction of a daily routine of prayers and penances which may be performed at last as by a machine, narrowing the mind, deadening the spirit, dulling the senses? Do the more imaginative and romantic float into mysticism, seeing visions, passing through ecstasies, and treading in the footsteps of Madame Guyon and her class?

It is strange that women—some of them young, beautiful, and romantic—can be found to bury themselves for life in the death-like existence of a nunnery; it is a yet greater wonder that men, with man's strength, freedom of action, energy of intellect and character, should in like manner be also found to do so.

Coming suddenly upon the monastic pile, again far before its ugliness, a sense of its singularity strikes upon the traveller. The number of slanting roofs; the irregularity of the whole structure; the wall of enclosure, with its little pepperbox turrets every here and there rising up, like sentinels guarding a city; the short steeples of what you suppose to be chapels, and which afterwards prove to be so: the small windows of the long row of buildings attached to the main edifice, which turn out to be some of the cells of the monks. There is an entire absence

of the commonplace about it ; quite different from anything to be found down in the world. It has an individuality and a character completely its own, just as its site is unique. It is the old and far famed Monastery of the Grande Chartreuse, and you feel that you are gazing upon something you have never seen before, the like of which you will never look upon again.

Making way round to the front entrance, as fast as the thick snow permitted, we rang at the bell of the great gates—of which we give an illustration. The peal, long and sombre, went vibrating away in the distance. When this ceased there was utter stillness again ; stillness more profound perhaps for the snow, which muffled every sound and footfall that might otherwise have given forth its own echo.



DISTANT SIDE-VIEW OF THE CONVENT.

A few moments' pause, and the door was opened by a monk : one of the serving Brothers : dressed in a flannel gown and cowl, but wearing ordinary black shoes. A smile of welcome passed over his face as soon as he caught sight of us. At all times they must be glad enough to greet people from the outer world. It must seem almost like a meeting between life and death. He bade us enter.

Passing through the portals, and through a large court-yard, we entered the main building, a certain portion of which is devoted to the entertaining of strangers. At the entrance, he delivered us over to the care of an ordinary servant : a young man of some nineteen or twenty years ; dressed in a blue blouse and coarse white apron : and placing his hand to his head in token of salutation he departed.

The youth led us down a somewhat narrow passage, into what is called

the Salle de Bourgogne, one of the refectories given over to the use of visitors. Another room we afterwards passed through was called the Salle de France, but it seemed of an inferior description, used either by the humbler class, or when the convent is unusually crowded.

The Salle de Bourgogne was a large, long room, with bare, white-washed walls : in the centre a long table of common deal wood, covered with a white cloth, coarse but clean ; a round table of the same common wood, stood in the further left hand corner : a number of plain hard chairs were scattered about ; opposite the door, at the further end as we entered, was a large cupboard for plates and dishes, and at this end, a locker containing some of the precious liqueur, for the fabrication of which the monks are so famous.

At the far end of the room two windows looked out upon a confined and dreary prospect ; and three windows down the right side looked on to the cold and the snow, and the mountain forests : an arrangement was in one of the windows for washing glasses. Opposite these windows, down the left side of the room, three or four doors opened into cells set apart for the use of visitors. The wooden floor was perfectly bare, and the room was warmed by a round American stove, of which all the heat seemed to go up the chimney ; very little of it certainly found its way elsewhere. Everything was of the plainest and roughest and most comfortless description, compatible with cleanliness and utility.

At the round table, dining, was seated a party of ten or twelve people, priests and laymen who had come up to visit the convent. A monk was attending upon them, dressed in a white flannel gown, his cowl thrown back, a thick girdle round his waist, from which was suspended a huge bunch of keys. As we entered, he came forward, welcomed us, placed chairs for us near the stove, and immediately brought out some liqueur from its capacious cupboard. Never was cordial more delicious, more thoroughly enjoyed, more gratefully received. After the cold, wet drive, the walk through the snow, perhaps nor the resources of a palace nor the suggestions of a doctor could have yielded a happier remedy. One glass tossed down, we felt tempted, like Oliver Twist, to ask for more ; but the hospitable monk, noting our frost-bitten condition, waited not a bidding to replenish. Then he asked us if we would dine, and upon receiving an unmistakable reply, the usual repast given to guests was ordered.

Whilst this was preparing, he left us to ourselves and the consolations of the stove, and returned to his duties at the round table.

Seldom have I seen a more contented face : never could I have conceived a monk so jovial within those walls of silence, abstinence, and severity. His face was pale and close-shaven ; his eyes were brown and keen, but soft and pleasant. His head, also shaven, was well shaped. In a quiet way, he joined in the conversation at the table ; was not above uttering a harmless joke, and laughed at the jokes of

others ; when he laughed, his whole face laughed ; even his teeth—splendid teeth, white and regular—laughed ; his fat, good-natured sides laughed as they shook in concert. It did one good to see him ; to hear his rich, round voice chime in amongst the other voices ; to see his eyes sparkling with intelligence and quiet humour. No mystic here ; no dull despair, no clouded brain. What, in the many years gone by, could have persuaded him to retire from the world, and take these vows ?

He was the Frère Procureur—the Frère Gérasime, as he told us afterwards—appointed to attend upon strangers, and take them over the monastery ; absolved, for this reason, from the vow of silence.

The party he waited on had just ended their dinner. The faces of the priests were red and shining. A stream of laughter and joking ran round the table, as if all felt better for the repast. None present, of a surety, appreciated the liqueur more than the priests themselves. It was a matter for reflection to see them toss down one glass after another, smack their lips, and still replenish. They were quite free and easy in their talk, and occasionally somewhat broader than might have been looked for in sober ecclesiastics. The monk himself was jolly ; yet he joined in only with innocent remarks. Upon his face was unmistakably the impression of a quiet mind and a pure heart : upon the faces of those he was serving as unmistakably there was an impression of the taint of the world.

By-and-by they all streamed out, and at the same time our dinner came in, and was placed on the long centre table. We had it quietly if not comfortably to our two selves, and for a short time the monk—we will call him by his name, Frère Gérasime—gave us his attention.

" You have come to see the monastery ? " said he in his own tongue. " You have not chosen very fair weather." A remark we could not conscientiously contradict.

" Could we have foreseen it, mon frère," said H., " assuredly you would not have had the pleasure of entertaining us to-day. If we are not laid up after this, it will be grâce to your famous liqueur."

" Ah ha ! " laughed Frère Gérasime, that rich, low, honest laugh did one good to hear. " Every one likes our liqueur. I never met with a man who did not. Truly, it is a good medicine and a wholesome."

" To which you occasionally resort ? " I asked.

" No, " no, " he gravely replied. " We are not permitted so much as to taste it. On the First of January, the fathers have one quart bottle given to them, which has to last them a whole year ; they are allowed only one bottle a year ; the brothers have none at all."

" That is hard lines. Have you many fathers in the Monastery ? "

" Forty "

" And brothers ? "

"Thirty. We are seventy in all. In this great building you would say there was room for at least seven hundred ; but we are not more than seventy at present. Beyond this, we have about sixty servants attached to the convent : servants who have taken no vows upon them, and are at liberty to stay or go down into the world, just as they please."

Our dinner was of the simplest kind. There was nothing ailuring even to a hungry stomach ; an epicure would have been beside himself. Soup-au-lait, *i.e.*, simply bread and milk served up in a tureen. At the same time was placed on the table a dish of fine trout, which I, with a passing thought to the splendid *forellen* of the Tyrol and Salzkammergut, hoped would be good. But it proved to be almost nauseous : hard, dry, and cooked in oil. The very smell was enough. I passed it over to H., who managed somehow or other to get through it. "Hobson's choice," said he, in answer probably to a gaze of admiration or astonishment at the empty dish. "He who goes in for delicacies here may starve."

Beyond this there was an omelette that was really good. They make them here with the yolk of the egg only : the whites are employed in making the liqueur : they get them from far and near, and still scarcely find sufficient for their purpose. A salad, cruetts of oil and vinegar ; a bottle of the red vin-du-pays, wine worse than vinegar itself ; a few dried figs, raisins, and unshelled almonds ; and, as a bonne bouche, a lump of garlic in a dish by itself, completed the menu.

"You will do well to stay the night with us," said Frère Gérasime, pointing to the snow that was falling in quick great flakes. "You would have a cold, dark drive back into the world."

"I don't know," said H., giving his head one of those wise twists that mean so much and say so little. The truth was he had a restless fit upon him, and so brought to bear upon the subject a few more of his prophetic visions concerning the weather. "I don't like the look of the sky," he went on. "With the wind in this quarter the storm may last some time. If we don't start back to-day, to-morrow we may be snowed up. When people are found with sufficient temerity to come up at this season of the year," he pointedly added, "it is a very common thing to be snowed in for a week together."

"A week's imprisonment, without even the distraction of hard labour!" I meekly rejoined, putting blind faith in his superior knowledge of the country and climate. "We should die of ennui. I very much want to spend a night here, and join in the midnight masses, but it won't do to risk a snowing-up."

H. shook his head decisively, ominously. There was no doubt about that.

"If you decide to stay," said Frère Gérasime, "you will be made welcome."

He left the refectory as he spoke, consigning us to the tender mercies of the servant who brought in the dinner : the same youth into whose hands we had first fallen. He was civil and obliging, and went about with a fixed smile on his face, and his mouth a little open. When we came to talk to him and ask him questions, he seemed almost a simpleton.

"Half-baked," said H., in vain trying to get intelligible answers to one or two trifling remarks. "It would never do for the monks to have sharp men about them. The secret of making the liqueur might ooze out. Other secrets too, if they have any."

As may be imagined our dinner was sooner ended than our appetite quenched. Shortly after, Frère Gérasime returned, and intimated his readiness to show us over the monastery. The round-table party followed him, and joined the visit of inspection. One of the priests immediately fastened himself on to me, and on further acquaintance proved by no means so bad a man as he might have been. There was a comic side to his character, and his remarks, as coming from a priest, were now and then surprising ; but they were harmless enough : and after all, his partiality for the liqueur was hardly to be wondered at. Perhaps it was his worst weakness.

So we commenced our wanderings through passages and cloisters, into cells and out of them, which all seemed interminable. Everything was of stone ; the flooring, the staircases, the cells appropriated to visitors. It is said they are able, on emergency, to make up twelve hundred beds, but this almost sounds like an exaggeration. The information was given to us at St. Laurent du Pont, and we neglected to prove its correctness at the convent.

The distinction between the fathers and the brothers is that the former are as a rule of superior rank and birth to the latter : they have brought in with them a certain sum of money : the latter can enter without any. The flannel gown in each case is white, but the cloaks of the fathers are also white, those of the brothers brown. There seems to be no other difference. The fathers, many of them, read and study (to what end?) in the retirement of their own cells ; others spend their time in wood-carving and other species of work. The brothers superintend the servants, generally conduct the building, and occupy themselves in various trades. The fathers are never seen within the building ; if one accidentally leaves his cell during a visit of inspection, and happens to meet strangers, he draws his cowl closely over his face, and hurries quickly through the cloisters. If by chance anyone is bold enough to address him, he is not permitted to reply.

"At what date was the monastery founded ?" asked somebody as we went along.

"In the year 1084," replied Frère Gérasime ; "by St. Bruno, who came of a rich family of Cologne. His bones do not repose here. We have not that honour and privilege."

"Is not this the mother convent?"

"Yes," he replied. "The other convents of the order are called simply Chartreuses: this is the *Grande Chartreuse*. Here only is the liqueur manufactured. But in point of beauty this building is perhaps the least attractive of all. Some of the others are magnificence itself."

"There are few traces of age here," I remarked, "although you call it the mother convent."

"It is not old," replied Frère Gérasime. "It has been burnt down many times. Very little of the present pile existed two hundred years ago. When St. Bruno first retired from the world and came up here, he lived in a cave, with five or six companions who joined him."

"What could have induced him to bury himself in such frightful solitude?"

"The same reasons, I suppose, which cause so many of us to follow his example," replied the frère, bending his body slightly as if in deprecation. "Tradition says that once, in walking through the streets of Paris, he met the funeral of an old friend. As the coffin passed him the lid burst open, and his friend sprang up, exclaiming, 'I am accused by the just judgment of God!' This had so great an effect upon him that he there and then determined to renounce the world. Here," continued Frère Gérasime, halting in the cloisters, "is our cemetery."

He threw open a door and let in a rush of cold air. The snow was lying on the ground, but not thickly. Here and there small hillocks were visible, and a few simple crosses without inscriptions. This was all.

"Who lie buried here?" asked my old priest.

"The monks," answered Frère Gérasime. "Fathers and brothers alike. In death there is no distinction. As each one dies and is buried, a small wooden cross is set over his grave: but it soon disappears, and we lie here amongst ourselves forgotten and unknown in death, just as in life we have long been forgotten and unknown by the world. Formerly the abbés and generals of the order had their graves distinguished by a stone cross, but these were all destroyed at the Revolution of 1789."

"That was a bad time for you?" said the priest.

"It simply ruined us," replied the monk, pathetically. "Before that period we were enormously rich. The convent belonged to us, the woods and forests surrounding us far and wide; the village of St. Laurent du Pont; much wealth. At the Revolution we lost all—everything. Our convent itself would have been sold, but nobody would buy it."

"And now?"

"Not even the convent belongs to us. We pay a small rent to Government—nominal it is true—for it and the surrounding territory. We are very poor compared with our former greatness."

"How do you now support yourselves?" asked the priest, who seemed much affected by the narrative.

"By cutting wood and selling it; by our cows, of which we have an immense herd; by our liqueur, which brings us in a considerable revenue."

"No wonder," cried the old priest, delicately feeling his waistcoat. "It is a wholesome cordial, my brother; a potent physic. I should even call it stomachic; particularly useful in cramps and spasms. This bleak climate is very favourable to cramps and spasms," he added,

"and here we have them in abundance."



THE PRINCIPAL CLOISTER.

Turning to me with a merry twinkle in his eye. "My brother, you are doing a good work, there."

The monk smiled. I must again repeat that I never saw a face smile more completely. It was delightful to contemplate. He seemed very human in his thoughts and emotions: able to understand and sympathize with the human nature of his audience.

"How long have you been here?" I could not forbear asking.

"Thirty-two years," he answered.

"Thirty-two years! He must have entered it when almost a boy, full of strength, comeliness, and intelligence. What could possibly have

induced him to forsake the world at that age? A question not to be asked on so slight an acquaintance.

"Have you never left the convent in these thirty-two years?"

"Never once. For thirty-two years I have been dead to the outside world. Thirty-two years ago I came up here, and here I am still. This," he said, changing the subject, "is our finest cloister. It is 660 feet long."

We were all at one end of it, and looked down a long vista. The accompanying sketch is very correctly drawn, though the door at the far end is more easily distinguished than it was in reality. This door opens into the cell of the father into whose charge the novices are consigned. Presently, as we were passing it the door opened, and the Father himself issued forth.

"Ah!" said Frère Gérasime, "a good opportunity. I will ask him if one of the fathers' cells is vacant and may be entered."

The monk stood in the doorway, his cowl close drawn. Frère Gérasime went up and spoke to him in a whisper. None could hear what passed. The monk did not reply in words, but gestures, shaking his head vigorously. As he did so the cowl fell back and betrayed a youngish man—not more, certainly, than thirty-five: tall, refined-looking, and handsome; pale with that death-like pallor that comes to each, and subdued, but evidently full of suppressed life and energy.

At present every cell was occupied, every monk in his cell. Silently he turned back and closed his door. Frère Gérasime rejoined us, and led the way through cloisters and passages, to the various chapels. The principal chapel was a long, plain hall, somewhat lofty. At the far end was the altar; on either side, down the whole length, were dark wooden seats, divided from each other precisely as the stalls in our own cathedrals. Here the monks day and night perform their masses. The other chapels were all much smaller, and are used only on occasion.

"This," said Frère Gérasime, turning into a large hall or room, opening into another of similar size, "is the refectory where we all dine together on Sundays and Saints' days. At all other times each monk dines alone in his own cell. But though we dine together on Sundays, we are not allowed to speak to each other. Perfect silence reigns. The monks have the choice of two simple dishes, besides bread and wine. Nothing else. Meat and fowl come not within our doors. We never give them even to visitors, though we permit them to bring meat for themselves if they cannot do without it. This room is the refectory of the fathers; that, yonder, of the brothers."

Down the tables on each side were ranged plates and common pewter jugs. At the end of the further room, through the archway, might be seen a large crucifix suspended against the wall.

"Are the monks never allowed to go out?" I asked.

"Yes," answered Frère Gérasime; "once a week they take a walk

up into the mountains together, and this is called le spacement. They are then absolved from their vow of silence, and are even commanded to converse with each other."

Proceeding upstairs, we passed through more interminable corridors and into cells set apart for visitors. These cells were plain, comfortless and terribly cold. A small wooden bedstead, the bedding good ; a common deal chair and table, the latter holding a small jug and basin ; and that was all.

The library was a large room, containing many well-assorted books. It formerly possessed also many ancient, curious, and valuable manuscripts, but at the Revolution they were taken to Grenoble and have never since been returned. The monks have access to the library, and are allowed to take books into their cells, the reading of which forms one of their occupations. They have eight hours of prayer and service ; eight hours of work and study ; eight hours of sleep.

Each father has three small cells and a garden to himself. Each garden is attached to its own cell, and is entered through a window or door in the cell, so that the occupant of the cell alone has access to it. The cells are lined with plain deal wainscoting, each containing a crucifix and skull ; the former for their devotions, the latter to keep them in perpetual remembrance of death, and assist them in the contemplation thereof ; the one an emblem of death itself, the other of Immortality and the Life to come. Every cell is furnished with a small plain table, a bed and a chair : and besides this, a working bench and tools. Some, as has been already observed, spend all their time in reading and study ; some in carving ; some in carpentering ; all do something : idleness is not allowed for a moment. But what a strange, sad existence to lead year after year !

The weather being unpropitious, the snow so deep upon the ground, it was impossible to go into the surrounding mountains. So about five o'clock we took leave of the convent and the good monk, Frère Gérasime. H. and I seemed to have made inroads upon his heart, for at the moment of starting he pressed upon us, in addition to a farewell glass, a bottle of the liqueur, "in case," as he observed, "we should be taken ill from cold on the road." He must surely have had ringing in his remembrance, the words of the old priest !

Our gratitude to our driver was not small when we found that by dint of superhuman efforts, he had managed to bring up his crazy vehicle to the lower gates of the monastery ; a patient perseverance which justly entitled him to an extra pourboire at the end of the journey. For some distance it was more like sledging than driving, as we slipped over the snow in our downward progress. Once or twice we narrowly escaped the edge of the precipice, and a momentary glimpse of the bottom was a sight far more terrifying than a forest phantom, as a rough jolt shot the old vehicle into the right track again.

At length we were safely landed at St. Laurent du Pont. The omnibus had started back for Grenoble, and our best way of returning was to hire a carriage to take us to Voiron, and thence to Grenoble by train. In less than half an hour a comfortable conveyance was at our service, and we were soon on the road again.

The drive was far more striking and picturesque and shorter than the drive from Grenoble. Our coachman—the son of the proprietor of the inn, who had taken the box because there was no one else at liberty—was a capital whip, and drove rapidly and easily down the roads, some of which were steep. Twilight was falling as we neared the end, wrapping the mountains in hushed silence. At length we clattered through the street of Voiron, a well-to-do, flourishing town,



PRINCIPAL ENTRANCE.

and stopped at the Grand Hotel. Here H. was well known, and officially greeted; and he declared that he would not again quit its hospitable walls until the inner life had received fresh food and sustenance.

A declaration which lost us the last train to Grenoble, and detained us at Voiron the whole night. The next morning we took an early train, and reached our destination in less than an hour's time.

It so happened that we paid a second visit to the Monastery of the Grande Chartreuse, and this time we decided to stay the night there. The appointed day was the Thursday before Good Friday. The weather was glorious; the sky blue and bright; the sun hot and glowing; the trees were green, the birds sang; the orchards were laden with blossoms pink and white; the hill-sides were luxuriant and luxuriating in their spring garments. Ten days had made no slight change in the face of nature: ten days of variable weather, fickle as a coquette;

blowing now hot, now cold ; one day summer skies and atmosphere ; next, fires, and frosts, and half a dozen great coats.

Disinclined for a second edition of the early omnibus, and a long dreary day at the convent, we chartered a carriage and pair on our own account and left Grenoble at two o'clock this bright splendid afternoon. The Fates might have been thought propitious. But as we neared St. Laurent du Pont, the skies became overcast with black, threatening clouds ; the wind suddenly rose and blew with the force of a hurricane, swaying the trees on the mountain tops from side to side, rushing through them with a wail that ended in a roar. At last we reached St. Laurent in a fury of the elements.

"Too fierce to last," said H., hopefully. "Nevertheless this is awful luck."

We entered the *salle-à-manger* of the hotel, where they stirred up the wood fire into a blaze, and hoped we had the intention of staying the night with them. H. went out to speak to the proprietor about a conveyance up to the Monastery. The horses that perform the journey to St. Laurent from Grenoble are unable to climb the long steep gorge. The carriage is also supposed to be too smart and delicately fashioned to go beyond the village.

In a few minutes H. came back.

"A pretty go !" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "We are booked here for the night, after all. They have neither horses nor carriage of any sort in the village. Not a single miserable pair of cattle, the landlord asserts. Nor will there be any until the morning."

"Is it so !" I cried, astonished at the ease with which H. resigned himself to this untoward fate. "Must we remain prisoners here after so much trouble and hardship ? Give up the night with the monks and their midnight masses ? Not without a struggle."

I went out in search of the landlord, who stood at his own door.

"No horses for the Grande Chartreuse ?" said I.

"Mais enfin, m'sieu, not one," returned he, shrugging his shoulders, and twisting his whole body into contortions, to give extra force to his words. "Not a single miserable bête from one end of the village to the other. Messieurs must remain here all night. To-morrow we shall have plenty of cattle."

"Very well," I said, quietly. "Monsieur will please pay attention. It will not suit us to remain here all night. Either you must find us a pair of horses within ten minutes, or we return immediately to Grenoble with those that brought us here."

In ten minutes' time a pair of small, strong horses came trotting round to the hotel, and we continued the journey in our own carriage ; the landlord protesting that the horses would never reach the Monastery, and the carriage would never pass through the tunnels.

The rain, happily, had ceased ; the snow lay less deep upon the

ground. We reached the convent, without let or hindrance, soon after seven in the evening. Frère Gérasime, surprised and overjoyed to see us again so soon, shook hands heartily.

"So you have come to spend Good Friday, with us!" he cried, taking this for granted. "That is right, and well done. I am very glad to see you. Jean, quick! some chartreuse. How cold you must be—and hungry! You will take some dinner?"

"By all means," replied H. "Your mountain air would breed a famine."

In a short time they brought us in just such a repast as has been already given in detail; except that the soup instead of being of bread and milk (*soup-au-lait*), was of bread and hot water—it seemed composed of little if anything else. Here, of course, where flesh and fowl are unknown, it cannot be made with anything but vegetables—at least I suppose not, though I have never qualified for cooking; but even the vegetables to-night seemed wanting.

I had never seen H.—who had taken little breakfast and no lunch—so ravenous. When I came to ponder over matters, I believed that herein lay the secret of his quiet acquiescence to the assertions of the St. Laurent landlord concerning the non-existence of "a single pair of miserable cattle." At least—so H. must have soliloquised—he should be in for a good dinner comfortably put before him; a matter of more consequence to a hungry man, not utterly indifferent to the good things of this world, than sleeping a night in a monastery, or assisting at all the midnight masses that ever were chanted. For my own part, having made up my mind, I would sooner have trudged the whole way to the convent than abandon the idea. Though I could quite conceive death on the road as the result.

A group of four or five men were seated round the stove when we entered. They had possibly walked up, for as soon as our dinner appeared three of them retired to their cells, with previous injunctions to the servants to wake them at midnight for the matins—the midnight masses.

"You, too, would like to be present at the matins?" said Frère Gérasime, appealing to us.

"Without fail," I answered. "But who will wake us?"

"I," said he. "I will undertake to do it myself. I will not trust to the servants. At a quarter before midnight I will come to you. Jean," turning to the man, "cells 20 and 21 for these gentlemen. And now," he added, "I will leave you to your repast. I must go about my own business. We have service in the chapel, and I have my own devotions in my cell."

He left the refectory, and we turned to the table, where dinner was waiting. H., I have said, was ravenous; luckily I was the very reverse, and could take nothing. So H. had the delicacies to himself, and

made short work of them ; save and except the inevitable lump of garlic.

"Now, Jean," said H. to the garçon—our old friend with the fixed smile—"a glass of chartreuse to assist digestion. Let it be the green liqueur. You wouldn't believe it," turning to me, "but I have never yet tasted the green. I don't know how it is ; no matter where you go, it is always the yellow they bring you—the green never. It is stronger than the yellow ; and I conclude more choice."

The green was accordingly poured out, and having tasted it, we simultaneously made a face at each other ; just as a monkey before a glass makes a face at his own reflection and sees it repeated. It was stronger than we had bargained for, thin, and not at all palatable. This green chartreuse is really medicinal ; given only in cases of illness, such as dyspepsia, and many other complaints ; and then sometimes on sugar, sometimes diluted with water. H. swallowed his by dint of firmness, I with the help of the said water.

"No more of that for me," said H. "Jean, quick, two glasses of yellow to take away the taste of the green."

"Oui, oui, m'sieu, as much as you will," replied Jean, shuffling up to the cupboard, his fixed smile relaxing if possible a hair's breadth.

The fire was dying out ; it was nearly nine o'clock, when visitors are supposed to retire to their cells. Jean began to look heavy about the eyelids ; his grin gained a more idiotic expression. Taking pity upon him, we bade him lead the way to our cells.

They were on the first floor, adjoining each other, looked on to the principal court yard, and will be found in the drawing of the chief entrance—to be precise—the second and third windows to the reader's right hand. Both were furnished exactly alike, without any regard to comfort.

"How are we supposed to shave ?" I wondered, looking in vain for a glass.

"Probably, we are not supposed to shave at all," said H., with a laugh. "I, for one, mean to be off to-morrow morning by half past seven, and have ordered the coachman to be in readiness. A little of this rude life goes a long way with me. I would rather go in for civilization. We can defer the demands of civilization—such as shaving, for instance—until we get back to St. Laurent and the world. Now I'm going to turn in until midnight. Of course you'll do the same. Good-night."

But for two reasons I did not follow his example. In the first place, I thought the sheets felt damp. What could you expect in a monastery, where there were no women to look after these things ? What could monks know about airing linen ? Secondly, I was afraid Frère Gérasime, with the best intentions in the world, might forget us, or oversleep himself, and I should miss the midnight mass. So, having brought a book with me, I sat down to read.

It was frightfully, terribly cold. I have never felt anything like it. Hands and feet were numbed ; the very candle burnt red and blue. Gradually I found I was turning over pages, and reading things that were not in the book ; the letters grew red and began to dance a demon dance on the leaves ; then they started into life and mocked and gibed at one another and at me : then all consciousness fled, and I slept.

Suddenly, at a quarter before midnight, I was brought back to life by a voice speaking to me in hushed, hurried tones. I was sitting bolt upright in my chair, book in hand, the candle before me flaring away. The door was half-open ; a face pale as a death's head was looking in upon me ; the large, dark eyes glistened ; the cowl was in part thrown back. In the first moment of awaking it seemed literally and verily that I gazed on the face of one returned from the grave. I looked up, lost and bewildered. It was Frère Gérasime. He had not forgotten his promise.

"Midnight will soon strike," he said, in hushed tones, that seemed almost to hiss through the dead silence. "The matins will begin. The monks are leaving their cells for the chapel. Follow me."

I was up in an instant, though with limbs so petrified that for a few moments I stood rooted to the spot. When the power to move came back, the monk had disappeared, how or where I knew not. The long dark corridors were in thick darkness I could not penetrate. I listened for his footsteps, but the silence of death reigned in this living tomb.

I hastened towards the cloisters. One by one the monks were coming out of their cells, each carrying a lantern, each enveloped in cloak and cowl. One by one, noiselessly as phantoms, they flitted through the long, melancholy cloisters, looking like spirits haunting the region of another world.

As the phantom-procession glided away, I returned to my cell for the candle, and at the chapel door blew it out and put it upon a stone ledge that seemed conveniently placed there for such purposes. Instead of that, hand and candlestick plunged into a cavern of holy water ! I transferred it to the ground, and entered the chapel.

From a height I looked down upon two long rows of monks. The place was in semi-darkness, lighted only by the lanterns, which chiefly threw light upon their books. The altar could not be distinguished in the gloom.

As a clock tolled out the hour of midnight—more than usually solemn in such a place and amidst such a scene—the monks commenced their mass, and for two hours they kept up the same monotonous gregorian chant they have used for nearly a thousand years. At intervals a monk—always one of the fathers—would glide noiselessly down the chapel, take his place at the lectern, chant from the book for about ten minutes, and then glide back to his place, to give way to another. Many of the voices were clear, musical, and powerful.

There was something inexpressibly solemn and weird, in listening to these monks at this witching hour ; in realizing that night after night, century after century, when the world is supposed, for the most part, to be sunk in sleep : reposing from the work of the old day, and gaining strength for the labours of the new: these men, who have retired from that world in the plenitude of strength and vigour, are living such a marvellous, incomprehensible life to themselves ; spending a part of their nights in devotion ; for two whole hours in the coldest, darkest, deepest portion, chanting their matins ; never absent from the scene unless illness keeps them away.

When I had been there about a quarter of an hour, finding H. did not appear, I, as well as I could, threaded my way in the darkness through the long passages. Trying one door after the other, and finding it locked and deserted, never man felt more lost than I ; yielding the impression of one of those terrible dreams which visit us when ill or unstrung, and haunt us for ever after. At last I found my way to his cell. He was stretched on the bed, asleep. "H.," said I, stirring him up as roughly as one dare touch a sleeping man, "you are losing the best part of the whole thing. The monks have been in chapel no end of a time. Get up."

He was bewildered, and reluctant to turn out ; but he managed to do it, and followed me to the chapel. Five minutes of nodding to and fro, and he got up again. "I can't stand it any longer," said he. "I have had enough of this." And he went back to bed. How he found his way he never knew, and I was never able to discover.

I waited on until towards two o'clock, and then was so petrified with cold, so overpowered with sleepiness ; induced probably by the influence of the cold and snow ; that without waiting to see the monks flit back to their graves, as they had flitted from them, I returned to my cell. This time, wrapping myself in a travelling rug, I threw myself on the bed and tried to sleep. For a long time the cold would not let me. Every now and then, small avalanches of snow would fall from the roof into the yard below, with a dull thud, rousing the heavy eyelids, and dispersing slumber. At length, as a grey dawn was creeping over sky and snow and mountain tops, with a shiver in its wake, I fell into a doze, from which, all too soon I was unmercifully aroused by H.

"Time's up," said he. "I ordered the carriage at half past seven. Jump out."

I had only to jump out of the rug, but it was hard work. I was cold, and stiff, and miserable. The events of the past night seemed but a dream. "Were we in the chapel at the midnight mass ?" I asked. "Or have I imagined it all ?" And then, without waiting a reply, I went off to the chapel door.

Yes; there was the candlestick, sure enough, just where I had left it; there, just above, was the cavern of holy water into which I had plunged

my hand. I entered the chapel, and looked around, and for a moment endeavoured to realize the scene of the past night. It was as if I had been assisting at a meeting of the dead. The place was now deserted and I left it with a strange, indescribable sensation.

H. was ready to start when I got back. Frère Gérasime was not to be seen at that early hour ; he was occupied in his own cell ; and we had to leave without bidding him farewell. But not before we had swallowed a glass or two of chartreuse, to drive out the past cold, and keep away that still to be encountered. The carriage was ready ; we took a last look around ; on the building, the snow, the trees, the mountains ; which we should not see matched down in the world. But we were not sorry to find ourselves by-and-by at St. Laurent, with a crackling fire blazing in its salle-à-manger ; with, as H. expressed it, signs of civilization and comfort around, and a chance of breakfast.

In a corner of the fire-place sat a man who was that day going up to the Grande Chartreuse, never, he said, to come down again. Going up, not to take vows upon him, but as a kind of boarder. He was past the middle age, and his mind seemed a little shaken. He had been tolerably successful in life, but had lost all his relatives and friends with the exception of one brother who was very well-to-do in the world and cared nothing about him. So he had made up his mind to end his days peaceably in the monastery. He had agreed to pay them a small yearly sum for his board, and to leave them all he possessed at his death. But I perceived that his resolve was considerably shaken when I assured him the cooking was bad. "Indeed," said he. "I had no idea of that. I always heard it was very good, and that you lived better there than in any other convent."

As soon as we had breakfasted we were anxious to be off. The morning was bright and pleasant, the sky clear, the sun warm and glowing : all this might change. It did not, nevertheless ; and the drive back to Grenoble was in proportion delightful.

"Never again," said I to M., after she had greeted the wanderers, "will I visit the Grande Chartreuse in winter—at any rate to pass the night there. In summer as often as you please. We have escaped this time alive; let us hope, unharmed ; Frère Gérasime is a character worth knowing : the monastery is curious ; the liqueur delicious, though you always affect to despise it : but all these things would scarcely have compensated us had we been frozen to death."

"At least," she replied, laughing, "let us be thankful that you have returned safely. Baby has been in despair without you. To lose husband and brother at one go, would have been too awful a calamity. But I see you have not shaved this morning. You will find hot water in your dressing-room."

C. W. W.

ADAM GRAINGER.

By the Author of "EAST LYNNE."

(Reprinted.)

I.

THE congregation was pouring out of a fashionable episcopal chapel at the west-end of London; many of them; for it was the height of the season, and the chapel was popular. Nearly all the carriages drove rapidly off with their freights; about half a dozen only remained, waiting for those who stayed to the after-service. It had become a recent custom with the preacher, Dr. Channing, to hold it every Sunday. A regal-looking, stately girl appeared nearly last, and entered one of the carriages. The footman closed the door after her, but he did not ascend to his place, nor did the carriage drive off. It was Miss Channing, and she took her seat there to wait for her father.

Following her out almost immediately, came a tall, gentlemanly, but young man, whose piercing hazel eyes were pleasant to look upon. He advanced to the carriage door, and shook hands with her.

" You are not staying to-day, Margaret ! "

" I felt too ill to stay," was Miss Channing's answer, whilst a rosy blush, which had stolen to her face at sound of his voice, began rapidly to fade. " I shall soon be better, now I am in the air."

" Margaret ——" He looked round, as he spoke the word, to make sure that the servants were not within hearing: and that conspicuous crimson came mixing with the paleness of her face again. " Margaret, don't you think we are going on in a very unsatisfactory way ? I do."

" I think," she said, " that you ought to remember the place we have just quitted, and choose serious subjects to converse upon."

An amused expression shone in his handsome eyes. " If this is not a serious subject, Margaret, I should like to know what is."

" Oh, but I mean—another sort of seriousness. You know what I mean. Adam, I shall never make you religious."

" Yes, you shall, Margaret : when you have the right to make me what you please."

" How did you like papa's sermon to-day ? " she inquired, hastily.

" Very much, of course."

" That portion of it about David and Saul ? "

" I did not notice that," he was obliged to confess. " I do believe, Margaret, I was thinking more of you than of the sermon."

" Oh, Adam ! that is so bad a habit,—letting the thoughts wander church ! But it may be overcome."

"Yes, yes : I mean to overcome it, and everything else that you disapprove. Margaret, I shall speak to Dr. Channing."

She looked startled. "If you do, I will never speak to you again. We must wait. Papa will not part with me."

"That, Margaret, is nothing more than an illusion. Your father, of all men, is not one to fly in the face of scriptural commands. It would be—what's that word clergymen so dread? Simony?"

"How very ridiculous you are this morning! Simony!"

"Sacrilege, then. He knows it is written that a man and wife are to leave father and mother, and cleave to each other. Does he want you to stay with him until you are forty?"

"I cannot talk about it now. You had better say farewell, Adam."

He shook hands, as a preliminary to departure; but, lover-like, lingered on. Lingered until Dr. Channing appeared. A short, fair, gentlemanly-looking divine : in face very unlike his daughter.

"Ah, Mr. Grainger, how d'ye do? I saw you in your place as usual. Hope Mrs. Grainger's quite well. It is too far for her to come. And a long way for you, every Sunday morning. I am truly happy to find a young man so earnest and regular in his attendance where his mind can receive the benefit of sound doctrine."

An ingenuous flush dyed Mr. Grainger's countenance. But he was unable to reject the compliment. He could not tell the self-satisfied Doctor that the attraction lay neither in the church nor the orthodox sermons, but in the pretty face of the preacher's daughter.

It was only within a year that Dr. Channing had preached in London, drawing fashion to his fashionable chapel. Previous to that, his ministry had lain in the country, as rector of Ashton-cum-Creepham—a profitable living that, but nothing to the income he was gaining now. His only child, Margaret, had formed a school friendship with Isabel Grainger, more deep and lasting than school friendships generally are. Highly respectable people were the Graingers ; Mr. Grainger, the father, holding a valuable appointment in a wealthy metropolitan insurance-office. They lived in the neighbourhood of London, in rather more style than the Channings—than the Channings did, then, at Ashton Rectory—and the families, through the young ladies, became intimate. It was thus that Miss Channing met with Isabel's only brother, Adam. He was in the office with his father, sufficiently high-spirited and handsome for any girl to fall in love with—though, as Isabel used to say, he was remarkably fond of having his own way. Some two years after she had left school, a lingering illness attacked Isabel Grainger. The symptoms, trifling at first, grew serious ; from serious they became hopeless. During the progress of this illness, the Channings removed to London, Dr. Channing having given up his rectory for a West-end chapel. Margaret, who had recently lost her mother, was allowed to spend a good portion of time with her

friend ; and it was round Isabel's death-bed that the liking which had arisen between Margaret and Adam grew into love. Since then, other changes had taken place. Mr. Grainger had died ; Adam had succeeded to his post in the insurance-office, and to a salary of eight hundred a year. Mr. Grainger had received considerably more ; as Adam no doubt would receive in time. But he thought he could marry very well upon this. But Dr. and Miss Channing had not become denizens of town, and of Eaton-place, for nothing. They were grand people now, living amongst the grand ; and they had, perhaps insensibly, acquired grand ideas.

Miss Channing went out the following morning, and did not reach home till luncheon time. It was waiting in the dining-room. She sat down to begin. Her father was frequently not in at that meal ; it was his desire that he should never be waited for. Something that she wanted was not on the table, and she rang for it.

"Papa is out, I suppose ?" she carelessly observed to the man.

"No, miss, the Doctor is in his study. Mr. Grainger is with him."

Mr. Grainger ! All Margaret's appetite left her on the instant. She laid down her knife and fork, and rose in agitation. "To bring matters to an issue so very soon !" was her resentful thought.

A few minutes, and Margaret heard him leave the house. Her father came into the dining-room. Dr. Channing was a passionless man, rarely giving way to emotion of any kind, save in the pulpit. He was apt to grow excited then, but in ordinary life his exterior was becomingly calm. He sat down, took some fowl on his plate, and requested his daughter to cut him a slice of ham.

She proceeded to do so, her heart beating violently, and scarcely conscious what she was about.

"Margaret ! Are you expecting visitors ?"

"No, papa. Why ?"

"You are cutting enough ham for half a dozen people. Do you wish me to eat all that ?"

She blushed violently at the mistake she had made, and pushed the superfluous slices out of sight underneath the joint. She then rose and stood at the window, looking out, but seeing nothing. Dr. Channing eat on placidly until he had finished.

The suspense was choking her. If Adam Grainger had been asking for her, she must either refuse or accept him : if the latter, why, all her glowing dreams of ambition would fly away ; if the former, life would become a blank she scarcely dared contemplate. It seemed that her father was not going to speak. He had taken up a book. Margaret was a straightforward girl : she liked to know the worst of things : it was better to bear than uncertainty.

"Papa—was not that Mr. Grainger who went out ?"

"It was. Mr. Grainger is not the only visitor I have had this morning," added Dr. Channing. "Colonel Hoare has been here."

More perplexity for Margaret. Colonel the Honourable Gregory Hoare was the father of Captain Hoare; and Captain Hoare was the most inveterate admirer she had, next to Mr. Grainger. A suspicion had more than once crossed Margaret's mind that he was the one for whom she should sometime discard Adam Grainger.

"Come, Margaret, it is of no use beating about the bush," said Dr. Channing. "Did you know of these visits? Did you send Mr. Grainger to me with a demand that I should allow you to become his wife?"

"No," said Margaret, rather faintly.

"I thought so. I informed him that he must be labouring under a mistake. He said there was an attachment between you; that it had existed some time."

"Oh, papa!" stammered the confused girl. "Gentlemen do assert strange things!"

"The very remark I made to him—that it was the strangest piece of rigmarole I ever heard. He persisted in it."

"How did it end? what was the result?" she inquired, still gazing from the window. "I suppose you refused him, papa?"

"There was nothing else I would do. You don't want to marry a tradesman, I conclude. And really those insurance-office people are little better than tradesmen," added the reverend divine. "Commercial, at any rate."

Margaret's cheek burnt, and Margaret's heart rebelled; and she winced, for *his* sake, at those slighting words, as she would have winced at an insult to herself. "Mr. Grainger is a gentleman, papa. Did you quarrel?" she added, drawing a deep breath.

"What did you say? Quarrel? I never quarrel with any one. I was especially civil to the young man. But I suggested to him that his visits here had better cease, as they would not be pleasant, after so singular a misapprehension."

A spasm of pain crossed Margaret's features. Dr. Channing saw it.

"Margaret! Do you regret my dismissal of this young man?"

"No, no, papa," she replied, rousing herself. "It is best as it is."

"Colonel Hoare also called. The first time he has done me the honour, although they attend my chapel. If ever there was a proud family, it is that of the Hoares. However—I have nothing to say against becoming pride. Colonel Hoare believes that his son and Miss Channing look on each other with a favourable eye. Is it so, Margaret?"

"Did he—for Captain Hoare—make me an offer of marriage?" rejoined Margaret, in a low tone, evading the question.

"It was coming to it, as I believe, when that young Grainger interrupted us: Spilson must needs usher him into the same room! Up

jumped the colonel, and said he would call in later. I should like Captain Hoare to be my son-in-law, Margaret: the mother, Lady Sophia, looks a charming woman. *That* will be a desirable connection if you like!"

So Margaret thought. Vain ambition rose in her heart, over-shadowing, for the moment, all unpleasant regrets.

"Colonel Hoare will be here again at half-past three. The conference is to relate to money and settlements. It would be proper, he said, for us to agree upon that score before matters went on further."

"Papa, had Mr. Grainger been in the position of Captain Hoare, possessing wealth and family, would you have objected to him?"

"No. I like the young man exceedingly."

Friends called to take Miss Channing for a drive. It was late when she returned: her father had gone out to dine with a brother clergyman. She was anxious to know what arrangements had been concluded with Colonel Hoare. She pictured herself the future bride of his distinguished son, she held her head an inch higher as she dwelt on it, and she kept repeating to herself that she *would* like him, she *would* forget Adam Grainger.

Easier said than done, Miss Channing.

She dined alone, and then went up to dress, for she was engaged to an evening party, where she would be joined by her father. Captain Hoare was to be there too—oh! let her look her best. And she did so. Entering the dining-room when she descended, Mr. Grainger confronted her. She quite started back. Though her heart, true to itself, beat with pleasure, her conscience dreaded the interview; and could he or she have vanished into air, after the fashion of an apparition, it had been welcome to Margaret.

"Margaret," he exclaimed, seizing her hand, "I have waited here a whole half hour; it has seemed to me like a day."

"I did not expect you," she faltered.

"You must have expected me," was the impatient rejoinder. "Margaret! the answer your father gave me was not *your* answer!"

"How can I go against my father?"

"The question was not mooted of whether I should call you wife," he continued, more and more impetuously, "we did not get so far; but he said there was no attachment between us—said it, as I understood, from you. What does that mean?"

"Not from me," she replied, in a timid tone; "I had not then spoken with him. But, Adam, my father says that what has been between us must be so no longer."

"Do you dare to tell me to my face that our long love is wasted? A thing to be forgotten from henceforth—thrown away as worthless?"

"You terrify me," she said, bursting into tears.

"Margaret, my love," he whispered, changing his angry tone for one

of sweet tenderness, “‘terrify’ is a strange word for you to use to me. Perhaps we are mistaking each other. Will you give me leave to ask for you of your father?”

She hesitated. Her heart told her that her life’s happiness was bound up in him : should she wilfully throw it away for ever? A conviction lay within her, that if *she* wished to marry Adam Grainger, her father would not hold out against it : for she was very dear to him. But, in their turn, arose other visions : of the pomp and pride of the world, of the lust and luxury of high life : all very attractive vanities, and in which she would revel to the full, should she become the envied daughter-in-law of the Honourable Colonel and Lady Sophia Hoare. Her resolve was taken, and she steeled her heart to him who stood there.

“Margaret,” he panted, “what is it that has come between us? To you I will not repeat what Dr. Channing said.”

“Adam—I fear—there is no help for it. We must part.”

He folded his arms and looked at her. “Say that again.”

“I am very sorry, Adam. I shall always think of you with regret. I hope —”

“Stay, Margaret! Do not let us bandy compliments in a moment like this. Give me an unvarnished answer. Is it your wish that we should part, and become as strangers?”

“The wish is urged by necessity,” she murmured : “my father’s will. He says—he does say, Adam—that I must marry in a higher sphere.”

“We will not speak now of your father’s will. Is it your will that I ask for you?”

“No,” she was obliged to reply ; “it is too late.”

“Are you promised to another?”

A desperate resolution came over her—that she would tell him the truth. It would serve to put an end to this scene, which was becoming too painful. “I believe I am,” she said, scarcely above a whisper.

A sudden paleness overspread his heated face, and he drew his hand across his brow. Heavy drops of emotion had gathered there.

“God forgive you!” he breathed. “As true as that you are a false woman, Margaret Channing, you will live to repent of this.”

“I hope that—after awhile—you will forgive me. I hope when our feelings—yes, *ours*—have softened down, that we shall renew our friendship. Why should we not? It would be valuable to have you for a friend through life.”

“Who is it?” he rejoined, with unnatural calmness.

“Captain Hoare. But, oh, Adam!” she added, with a burst of irrepressible feeling that ought to have been kept in, and she laid her hand upon his arm, as in the days of their affection, “do not think I love him! In one sense I am not false to you, for I can never love

him, or any one as I have loved you. The marriage is suitable, and I have acceded to it from worldly motives. It will take me years—it will—even of my married life—to forget you. Give me your forgiveness now, before we part."

For answer, Mr. Grainger shook her hand from his arm, and passed out at the door.

She sank down on a chair and gave vent to a passionate burst of tears : she thought her heart was breaking. When she became calmer, she dragged herself out to the carriage.

With the lighted rooms, the music, and the gay crowd she was soon mixing in, Margaret's spirits returned. "I *will* strive—I will thrust regret and care from me," she murmured ; "the anguish will not be so great if I make a resolute effort against it. How late Captain Hoare is "

Captain Hoare dined that day with some young men at their club, and only went home afterwards to dress. His father and mother were sitting alone ; the colonel over his wine.

"What's the news ?" cried the captain, in a listless sort of manner, as if not very much caring whether he received an answer or not. Consequently he was scarcely prepared for the sharp way in which his mother took him up.

"The news is this, sir : that you ought to have inquired further, before despatching your father on a fool's errand. Twice he went !"

"A fool's errand !" echoed the gallant captain.

"A fruitless one," interposed the colonel. "We were against the match, Edward, as you know, for the Channings are not people of family —"

"It was derogatory even to think of it," interrupted Lady Sophia. "I strove to impress that upon you, colonel, before you went."

"My dear—Edward was so bent upon it : and I thought there might be mitigating circumstances. If the girl had had twenty or thirty thousand pounds told down with her, one might have put up with it. However, all's well that ends well. Channing refuses to give her any money until his death, so the matter is at an end."

"Why does he refuse ?" asked the captain, with a very blank look.

"He told me he should give her none before he died, and that what there would be for her then, the precise amount, he really could not state. And he proceeded to ask me, in a tone of resentment, if I had come there to make a *barter* for his daughter."

"I hope this will cure you of looking for a wife in an inferior family, son Edward," observed Lady Sophia. "Who are these Channings ? Nobody. He was nothing but a country parson : it is only since he got this chapel that even their name has been heard of."

"But Miss Channing [will surely have money, sir," remonstrated Captain Hoare, passing over his mother's remarks without comment.

"I don't know," was Colonel Hoare's reply. "The Doctor's words sounded to me anything but satisfactory; shuffling, in fact. You cannot marry her upon the uncertainty. I should never give my consent."

"Well—if there's no help for it. I don't feel inclined to marry the best girl that ever stepped, unless she can bring grist to the mill. But she was a deuced nice girl," he added to himself, "and I took it for granted the old parson would give her a pile of gold."

So, little wonder Captain Hoare was late. When he entered, Miss Channing was waltzing in exuberant spirits—so far as anything appeared to the contrary. He came up to her when she was free. She was standing in the recess of the bow window, which opened upon a small terrace filled with exotics. At the moment no one was there but herself. Captain Hoare took her hand.

"I thought you told me you should be here early?" she remarked.

"I did mean to be. But—as things have turned out—I doubted whether I ought to appear at all, and lost time deliberating. Then an irresistible impulse seized me to come and bid you a last farewell."

Had he spoken in Hebrew, his words could not have been much less intelligible to Miss Channing. "Bid me farewell!" she repeated. "I do not understand. Is your regiment ordered abroad?"

Neither did Captain Hoare understand just then. "Perhaps you have not seen Dr. Channing?" he exclaimed, after a pause, the idea occurring to him.

"I have not seen papa since the middle of the day."

"You are not ignorant, dear Miss Channing, that I had set my heart and hopes upon you," he rejoined, gently retaining her hand, and lowering his voice to a whisper. "do not think you could have mistaken my sentiments, although they were only implied."

Her blushing cheek and downcast eye told him that she had not.

"And now to have these delightful hopes knocked on the head by two crabbed old fathers is almost more than mortal ought to stand. I can only hope you will not feel it as I do."

A cold shiver of dismay ran through the heart of Margaret Channing. "I am not quite sure what it is you mean," she faltered.

"What a blessing if there were no such thing as money in the world! My father called on Dr. Channing this afternoon to open negotiations, and the two must get differing about the base-metal part of the transaction. So he came home, laid his embargo on me, and ordered me to consign you to the regions of forgetfulness. You will, no doubt, receive the same command, as to me, from Dr. Channing. The unnaturally hard stuff that fathers are made of!"

She could not entirely prevent the expression of her wounded feelings.

struggling to her face. Captain Hoare saw its paleness, and spoke with more feeling than he had hitherto displayed.

"Dear Miss Channing, I am deeply sorry for this termination to our valued friendship. I should have been proud and happy to call you my wife, and that I may not do so is, believe me, no fault of mine. We may not act against circumstances, but I shall regret this day to the last hour of my life. And now I will say farewell : it is painful to me to linger here, as it must be painful to you."

He wrung her hand, and quitted the rooms ; and Margaret Channing's spirit sank within her. Confused visions of the true heart she had thrown away *for nothing* rose before her in bitter mockery. One came up and claimed her for the dance : she did not know what she answered, save that it was an abrupt refusal. She sank down in a sort of apathy, and presently saw her father.

"I suppose you are not ready to go home, Margaret ?"

"Oh yes, I am, papa. My head aches with the heat, as it did yesterday in church. I shall be glad to go."

"Then, say good-night to Mrs. Goldingham, and come."

"Thankfully," she muttered to herself. "Anything to be alone."

Until they were nearly at home Dr. Channing was silent, leaning back in his corner of the carriage. The door was in sight when he raised himself to speak.

"A pretty sort of a high and mighty fellow that Colonel Hoare is ! Do you know what he wanted ?"

"No," was Margaret's answer.

"Wanted me to undertake to give you twenty thousand pounds down on your wedding-day, condescendingly intimating that it might be settled upon you. I told him I should not do it : that what would come to you would come at my death, and not before."

"And then ?" repeated Margaret, in a low, apathetical sort of voice — "what did he say then ?"

"Then he stiffly rose, said the proposal he had hoped to make on behalf of his son must remain unmade, and so marched out. They are a proud, stuck-up set, Margaret : we are better off without them."

"Yes. Perhaps we are."

"You do not regret it, child ?" he added, a shade of anxiety visible in his voice.

"Papa, I do not regret Captain Hoare. I do not really care for him."

II.

It was a foggy day in November, sixteen or seventeen months subsequent to the above events. The dusk of evening was drawing on, and Margaret Channing sat in front of a large fire, her eyes fixed dreamily on the red coals. What did she see in them ? Was she tracing out the

fatal mistake she had made? She had been a sadder and a wiser girl since then.

Never but once, since, had she seen Adam Grainger; and that was accidentally. Margaret despised herself thoroughly for the despicable part she played. She was endowed with sound sense and good feeling, and she now believed that a species of mania must have come over her. But she had reaped her punishment: for her heart's sunshine had gone out with Adam Grainger.

A circumstance had this day caused her mind to revert more particularly to the past: the announcement in the public papers of the marriage of Captain Hoare. He had wedded a high-born lady, one of his own order. Strange to say, Miss Channing had not received an offer of marriage since that prodigal day which had brought her two; strange, because she was a handsome and popular girl, occupying a good position, and looked upon as a fortune. The neglect caused her no regret; and it is a question whether she would have said "Yes," had such been offered her. Thought and experience had come to Margaret Channing, and she knew, now, that something apart from wealth and grandeur was necessary to constitute the happiness of married life. She had learnt, also, to be less fond of gaiety than formerly; she had become awake to the startling truth that life cannot be made up of pleasure and self-indulgence; that it has earnest duties which call imperatively for fulfilment. So Margaret sat over the fire this evening in her usual reflective, but not thankless or repining mood; if the last year or two could come over again, how differently would she act! She was interrupted by the entrance of her father. He drew an easy chair close to the fire and sat down, shivering.

"Margaret, I wish you would write a note for me. I don't feel well. It is so cold to-day!"

"Dear papa!" exclaimed Margaret, in surprise. "It is quite warm: a muggy, close day. I was thinking how uncomfortable this great fire made the room."

"I tell you, child, it is cold; wretchedly cold. Or else I have caught cold and feel it so. What have you rung for?"

"For lights, papa. I cannot see to write."

"Don't have them yet: I cannot bear them: my head and eyes are aching. There's no hurry about the note for this hour to come."

Margaret sat down again. Dr. Channing was leaning back in the chair, his hands in a listless attitude, and his eyes closed. She gently touched one of the hands. It was burning with fever.

"Papa! let me send for Mr. Williams."

"Now, there you go, Margaret, jumping to extremes," was the peevish rejoinder. "What do I want with a doctor? If I take some gruel and go to bed early, I shall be all right in the morning."

Dr. Channing was not "all right" in the morning. He was worse,

and unable to rise. His daughter, without asking this time, sent for Mr. Williams. Before two days had elapsed Mr. Williams brought a physician: and the physician brought another. Dr. Channing was in imminent danger.

Margaret scarcely left his bedside. Though she would not allow herself to fear. Hope was strong within her. It proved to be a delusive hope. In little more than a week Dr. Channing was dead. And had died without a last farewell, for since the third day of his illness he had not recognized even Margaret.

Margaret had borne up bravely, but now she was utterly cast down. Ten days ago he was full of health and life, and now stretched there!

She had no near relatives to turn to for comfort in her sorrow. Plenty of carriages drove to the door with ceremonious cards and condolences; but *these* are no solace to the stricken heart. In one respect it was well for Margaret that she was alone. Had there been any one to act for her, she would have lain down unresistingly to give way to her grief: as it was, she was compelled to be up and doing. There were so many things to be thought of, so many orders to give.

The funeral must be settled, and Margaret must see the undertaker. She was inexperienced in these matters, but thought, in her honour and affection for the dead, that she could not give orders for a too sumptuous procession. It is a very common mistake. The same day that she had arranged this, her father's solicitor called, to whom it had not occurred to her, in her trouble, to write.

Mr. Padmore inquired what use he could be of, and they proceeded to speak about the funeral. Margaret was mentioning the directions she had given, when he interrupted her, speaking impulsively.

"My dear Miss Channing, have you considered the enormous expense of such a funeral?"

Margaret looked at him indignantly. "No, sir, I have not taken *expense* into my consideration."

"But—pardon me—are you sure that you are justified in thus incurring such an outlay of money?"

Her spirits were broken with sorrow, and she burst into tears.

Mr. Padmore fidgeted on his chair. "My dear young lady, what I meant to ask was, whether you are sure you will have the money to pay for it?"

"What?" uttered Margaret.

"I fear that Dr. Channing has not died rich. Not, indeed, in easy circumstances."

Margaret thought the lawyer must be dreaming. Dr. Channing not in easy circumstances, when their house was so full of luxury!

But it was that very luxury which had assisted to impoverish Dr. Channing, Mr. Padmore said, when explanations were entered on. Ever since he had resided in town, his rate of living had far exceeded

his income, neither had he been quite a free man previously. He had borrowed money at different times, which was yet unpaid.

Margaret's heart sank within her as she listened. A hasty thought occurred to her. "There is the insurance money! Papa had insured his life."

"My dear, yes. But there are debts."

She dropped her head upon her hand. It was a startlin communication.

"I did not know that you were wholly unacquainted with these facts," the lawyer continued. "I hope you will not feel that I have spoken unkindly in alluding to them."

"No, no; I thank you; it was right to let me hear this. But allow me, Mr. Padmore," she added, with sudden energy—"allow me to know all my position: do not hide anything. Am I to understand that my dear father leaves no money behind him? None?"

"I cannot tell that, yet. If any, it will be very trifling. Nothing like—I am grieved to say it—nothing like a provision for you."

"Oh, I do not think of myself," she said, in a pained tone. "I am thinking what a weight all this must have been upon his mind."

So the costly ceremony was countermanded, for a more simple one.

Dr. Channing's affairs turned out to be as Mr. Padmore stated. There was sufficient to pay the debts, and but a very small surplus over that—about a hundred and sixty or seventy pounds. The furniture was disposed of advantageously, standing as it was, to the parties who had taken the house off Margaret's hands, and the carriages and horses were sold at a friendly auction.

It was the night before Margaret Channing was to quit her home. She had remained in it until the last, superintending and arranging. The books and the plate she had only that day sent away to the place where they were to be sold; and she had packed up her own clothes and effects, ready to be removed with her on the morrow. Altogether she was very tired, and sat down on a low chair before the fire, her head aching. How miserably the new year had come in for her!

She sat looking into the fire—her old habit—tracing out events in her imagination. Friends, but not many, had pressed invitations upon her at the time of Dr. Channing's death—"Come and stay a week with us;" or "a few days," or "a month," as the case might be. But Margaret said "No" to all. She deemed it best to have no deceitful procrastinations, but to grapple at once with her position. She had done so, and decided upon her plans. She was well-educated and accomplished, and she resolved to go out as governess. There would be little difficulty in finding a desirable appointment for the daughter of Dr. Channing. As she sat there, a remembrance came over her of Captain Hoare—of the position she had once thought to occupy as his wife: how different that romance from this reality! But not half so

much did she shrink from this remembrance as she did at another one —her unjustifiable conduct to Adam Grainger. She had thrown away the dearly coveted hope of being his wife ; thrown it away for a chimera which had failed her. Oh ! to compare what she might have been with what she was ! with her isolated situation, her expected life of labour ! Next, her thoughts wandered to her father ; and tears came on, and she cried long and bitterly.

A servant, the only one she had retained in the house, came in and aroused her. "A gentleman has called, ma'am," she said, "and wants to know if he can see you. Here's his card."

Margaret held it to the fire, and strained her dim eyes over it. "Mr. Grainger. What can he want ?" she mentally exclaimed. "It must be something about the insurance. Show the gentleman in here, Mary ; and light the lamp."

He shook hands with her as he entered, with more of sympathy and tenderness of manner than he might have done, had he not detected the change in her—the once blooming Margaret Channing. Her tearful cheek was wan and pale, and her frame much thinner than formerly ; unless the deep black of her mourning attire deceived him.

"I beg you to excuse this interruption," he began, when the maid had quitted the room ; "I am here at the desire of my mother. She thinks there has been some mistake—that you did not receive the note she wrote to you last week."

"I have not received any note from Mrs. Grainger," replied Margaret, pressing her hand upon her side, for her heart was wildly beating at the presence of one whom she still fondly loved. "Except one she kindly wrote to me when papa died."

"Not that ; you replied to that, I believe ; this one was written on Thursday or Friday last. Its purport, Miss Channing, was to beg the favour of your spending a little time with my mother when you leave here." —he hastened to add—"am no longer living at home."

The tears rushed into Margaret's eyes. "Every one is so very kind," she said. "I am much indebted to Mrs. Grainger for thinking of me ; but I must decline. Though I will certainly go down and personally thank her. She is not able to move out of doors, I believe."

"She has not been for several months past. She wished me to inquire into your plans : though I know not whether you may deem it an impertinence."

"No, no," answered Margaret, scarcely able to prevent the tears falling, so miserably did old recollections, combined with present low spirits, tell upon her that evening. —"I feel obliged by Mrs. Grainger's kind interest. I am going to-morrow to Mr. Padmore's for a week or two ; he and Mrs. Padmore would have it so. By the end of that time I hope to have found a permanent home. Friends are already looking out for me. I must turn my abilities to account now."

"But it is not well that you should do so," he rejoined, with some agitation of manner—"it is not right for Dr. Channing's daughter. We heard of your determination from Mr. Padmore, and it grieved and vexed my mother. She would be so delighted, Miss Channing, if you would, at any rate for the present, make your home with her."

Margaret did not answer. She was struggling to suppress her rebellious feelings.

"If you would but put up with her ailments, she says, and be free and gay as in your own home, she would be more happy than she has been since the death of Isabel. Allow me to urge the petition also, Miss Channing."

Margaret shook her head, but the tears dropped forth uncontrolled, and she covered her face with her hands. Mr. Grainger advanced; he drew her hands away; he bent over her with a whisper.

"Margaret! I would rather urge one of my own. That you would come—after awhile—to *my* home."

She rose up shaking. What did he mean?

"Has the time come for me to ask you once again to be my wife? Oh! let me hope it has! Margaret, dearest Margaret, it was in this room you rejected me: let it be in this room that you atone for it."

"I can never atone for it," she replied, with a burst of anguish. "Do not waste words upon me, Mr. Grainger; I am not worth it."

"You can atone for it, Margaret. You can let my home be your home, my name your name; you can join with me in forgetting this long estrangement, and promise to be my dearest wife."

"But I do not deserve this," she sobbed. "I deserve only your contempt and hatred."

"Hush, hush, Margaret! You shall take my love instead—if you will treasure now what you once flung away."

"Indeed I do not deserve your love," she murmured; "it is too great reward for me."

"Is it?" he answered, as he wound his arms round her. "It shall be yours, Margaret, for ever and for ever."



MISS ED.

THE moon's silver arrows fell at our feet :
 My love, he cried :
 " Ere the next bright bow be bent in the blue,
 Be thou my bride."

And I answered lightly : " There is no haste ;
 Though moon and moon
 Wax and wane, and wax ; the sun run his course ;
 'Twere all too soon."

He upreared his head ; he unlocked my hand :
 His words fell low ;
 " For that which we hate 'tis ever too soon—
 No growth too slow.

" Ah ! thou lov'st me not." " By thy leave," I said ;
 " There's love and love :
 That thy love is truer love than mine own
 Is yet to prove.

" 'Tis the waving corn and sweet-smelling flowers
 Give joy to me ;
 'Tis the honey and fatt'ning meal alone
 Contenteth thee.

" Than rich autumn's splendour fairer I wis
 Is budding May :
 To be wooed is sweeter far than to wed ;
 Red dawn than day."

" Thou hast had thy maying," he cried in wrath,
 And left my side :
 " I must seek my harvest elsewhere, and find
 Another bride."

" Success to thy search !" I laughed ; and he went.
 Charley, my own !
 The rose-tints paled in my heaven when I
 Was left alone.

But thou hadst thy noon ; thy harvest of bliss ;
 Thy corn and wine.
 Was the bread so sweet ? Did thy cup lack naught
 Of flavour fine ?

I know I've missed somewhat : I feared to brush
 With hasty lip
 From the fruit the bloom ; but I snapt the stem
 And let it slip.

So I lost my peach : you let go my love :
 Ah, well a-day !
 Each thing in its season : not all in each,
 Nor each for aye.

EMMA RHODES.